



*The* **BUDDHIST**  
**WORLD** *of Southeast Asia*

SECOND EDITION

DONALD K. SWEARER

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*The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*

SUNY SERIES IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
HAROLD COWARD, EDITOR

*The* **BUDDHIST**  
**WORLD** *of Southeast Asia*

SECOND EDITION

DONALD K. SWEARER

**SUNY**  
PRESS

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In memory of  
Kenneth K. S. Ch'en and Singkha Wannasi,  
mentors and friends

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

*The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* is the result of my observation and long-term study of Theravada Buddhism. My interest in Buddhism began as a result of personal experience. In the late 1950s I spent two years in Bangkok, Thailand, where I lived in a Buddhist culture and taught at a Christian college and a Buddhist monastic university. Since that time I have spent several sabbatical leaves in Thailand with shorter stays or visits in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. Although my understanding of Buddhism has benefited from the work of scholars from different disciplines, this monograph also reflects my personal experience in Thailand and Southeast Asia. This experience is informed by teaching in the liberal arts college classroom, the primary context in which I have spent most of my academic career. My approach to Buddhism, especially its expression in Thailand, is a multidisciplinary approach integrated with a personal appreciation of its depth of meaning and diversity of expression. This monograph is written for readers who wish to study Buddhism, not simply as a normative doctrinal system, but as a historically and culturally contextualized religious tradition, or to put it another way, Buddhism as a *lived* tradition.

This study of Buddhism offers a broad, holistic analysis of the Buddhist tradition as it has been shaped within the historical and cultural milieu of Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. Diverse forms of Buddhism took root in Southeast Asia, but from the twelfth century C.E., the branch of Buddhism known as Theravada or “Teaching of the Elders,” with its extensive and diverse scriptural canon written in the Pali language, gradually assumed a dominant religious and cultural role.<sup>1</sup> Historical evidence from major archaeological

sites as well as contemporary Buddhist rituals demonstrate the influence of Hinayana, Mahayana, and Tantrayana forms of Buddhism, which also incorporated Brahmanical and Hindu elements. It must be kept in mind, furthermore, that the forms of Buddhism and Hinduism that took root in Sri Lanka and in insular and mainland Southeast Asia, grew in diverse cultural soils already enriched by various indigenous belief systems from the Sinhalese, Burmese, Tai,<sup>2</sup> Lao, and Khmer peoples. We must reject the notion that there existed in mainland Southeast Asia any kind of Theravada Pali “orthodoxy”; this is an ahistorical projection, first constructed by monks of the Sinhalese Mahavihara monastic lineage and subsequently perpetuated in the modern period by both Buddhist adherents and Western scholars. Today, Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia mirrors the rich diversity of its variegated historical and cultural development. In one sense this monograph provides a demonstration of this claim. My use of the term, Theravada Buddhism, therefore, encompasses this sense of the richness and diversity of the tradition.

A problem adheres to the use of the word, *monk*. Frequently, Buddhist scholars construct the Buddhist monk as a rational renouncer who single-mindedly walks the Buddha’s path toward enlightenment (nibbana). They either ignore or are oblivious to the multiple roles played by the monk, not just in the present day, but also throughout Buddhist history. The word, monk, is further problematized because it has been gendered as male, requiring that the female “monk” be identified as “nun.”<sup>3</sup> In Theravada Buddhism the community of Buddhists is divided into four groups—male and female renunciants or almspersons (bhikkhu and bhikkhuni), and their male and female lay supporters (*upasaka* and *upasika*). Although it is an oversimplification, it may be said that both men and women who joined the Buddha’s order or sangha were fundamentally alike in the sense that they shared the common designation of “almspersons.” I shall use monk in this inclusive sense, although in specific contexts, I shall refer to male almspersons, female renunciants, or for clarity, simply monks and nuns. In parts 1 and 3 of the monograph, specific historical and contemporary issues of women and Buddhism will be explored. My use of the word, monk, therefore, acknowledges

both gender distinction and the historical diversity of roles played by Buddhist almspersons.

Dramatic changes have occurred in the Buddhist world of Southeast Asia since the first edition of this monograph appeared in 1995. The pervasive effect of globalization has further intensified the transformation of the world's political economies, cultures, and societies. Mainland Southeast Asia (Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos) and Sri Lanka, which share the teachings, practices, and monastic institutions of Theravada Buddhism, have also been transformed. Despite the significant differences that pertain among these countries where Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion, Buddhism continues to be a major factor in their politics, economies, and cultural identities. The neo-Marxian and secular-liberal predictions of the withering away of religion have been proved false, whether the reference is Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, or—in the case of this monograph—Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. For example, Buddhism is being revived in Cambodia; new monastic and lay movements are flourishing in Thailand; Buddhist monks are actively involved in the political conflict current in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. These are hopeful signs of a vigorous, vital Buddhism, not of a moribund religion.

Hopeful signs notwithstanding, overall Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka faces an uncertain future. Will the Buddhist institutions in these countries, their teaching and practices, continue to inform the cultural identities of the Thai, Burmese, Lao, Khmer, and Sinhalese, or will they fail to adapt sufficiently to the changing material realities of their increasingly globalized societies and, hence, become largely irrelevant to daily life's circumstances? The complexity of the many worlds of Theravada Buddhism defies any easy generalization about its future and challenges any predictions. As this monograph demonstrates, Buddhism is not one "world" in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka, but many different worlds. It is this very diversity and adaptability that has contributed to its enduring influence. What will the future hold? Certainly for its continuing viability, it will require an even greater degree of flexibility

and adaptability while at the same time retaining those principles and values that have informed, inspired, and challenged the lives of its adherents.

This revised and expanded edition of *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* includes numerous additions and changes. Part 3 has been greatly expanded to take into account some of the most significant developments that have occurred within the Buddhist world of Southeast Asia since 1995. Major additions have also been made to the Ideal Action section of part 1 and the Modern Nationalism and Buddhism section of part 2. Furthermore, in this edition the focus on Buddhism in Thailand has been further enhanced, especially in part 3.

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In the decade since the publication of the first edition of *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* I have received invaluable assistance from colleagues in Chiang Mai, especially Sommai Premchit, the late Mani Payomyong, and Phaithoon Dokbuakaew. Over many years my research in northern Thailand has been greatly facilitated by the friendship and support of John W. Butt, Senior Advisor at the Payap University Institute for the Study of Religion, Culture, and Peace, and Martha Butt, Emeritus Vice President for International Affairs at Payap University. Eric Braun, a specialist in Burmese Buddhism at Harvard University graciously commented on my discussion of Buddhism in Myanmar. Dr. Louis Gabaude of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Chiang Mai, has shared with me over the years not only his rich archival collection but also his unsurpassed knowledge of Buddhism in northern Thailand. I am particularly indebted to Nancy Chester Swearer who copyedited the entire manuscript and prepared the bibliography and index.

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## INTRODUCTION

Everyone recognizes the saying, “It has to be *seen* to be *believed*.” With one rather modest change—“it has to be *seen* to be *understood*”—this familiar quip becomes peculiarly appropriate to the study of religion. A religious system consists of diverse phenomena: sacred texts, myths, symbols, institutions, rituals, festivals, sacred sites and so on. A religion encompasses more than a stipulated set of beliefs and practices; it also embodies and expresses the meanings and aspirations of a particular culture. Because of its diversity and complexity, religion cannot be characterized simply as a set of teachings nor easily comprehended in any holistic sense. The study of a religious system or even of specific aspects of that system calls not only for analytical skills, but also the qualities of imagination, empathy, and vision, which I suggest requires a kind of “seeing.” The nature of the phenomena constituting a religious system cannot be adequately understood if one only reads a religious text or studies religious truth claims about the nature of reality. Any attempt to understand religion that does not take into account the historical and cultural richness of the lived tradition runs the risk of reductionism and distortion.

Religions are multiplex, and the phenomena constituting religion embody different levels of meaning. In the light of such multivalency, religion has been characterized as a “symbol system.” To study religion, in my view, challenges us to go beyond the literal, the obvious, and the purely descriptive, to discern the hidden meanings and deeper levels of human experience embedded in (or behind) the text, the rite, and the festival. Rather than seeing only the surface (“face value”), we have to look in the “folds,” the hidden places to

find the truth of a religion. Religious belief systems may appear to have an atemporal character, but historical, cultural, social, economic, and political contexts cannot be divorced from a religion any more than an individual's profession of faith, be it Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, can be separated from his or her personal, subjective experience.

In the following pages we shall study Theravada Buddhism within the many cultures and against the historical backdrop of Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka and three differing social and political contexts: the traditional village; the state; and the modern urbanized environment. Each context provides a background for examining distinctive features of Buddhism in Southeast Asia: the integrative and syncretic nature of traditional, popular religion; the role of religion in state formation; and the challenge to traditional Buddhist thought and practice by the forces of rapid change associated with urbanization and modernization.

This monograph introduces the study of Theravada Buddhism and society within the cultural setting of Southeast Asia, with particular focus on Thailand. In a broad sense, it is an examination of the interaction of a religious worldview and a cultural ethos, and the ways in which the peoples of Southeast Asia have organized and expressed their lives in meaningful patterns.<sup>1</sup> Each part of this book will examine these patterns for their coherence as well as their rich and fascinating variety.

## PART I

# THE POPULAR TRADITION

All too often a textbook picture of Theravada Buddhism bears little resemblance to the actual practice of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. The lived traditions of Myanmar,<sup>1</sup> Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka seem to distort and sometimes subvert the cardinal teachings of nibbana, the Four Noble Truths, or the Noble Eightfold Path familiar to the Western student of Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> The observer enters a Theravada Buddhist culture to discover that ordination into the monastic order (*sangha*) may be motivated more by cultural convention or a young man's sense of social obligation to his parents rather than the pursuit of transforming wisdom; that the peace and quiet sought by a meditating monk may be overwhelmed by the amplified rock music of a temple festival; that somewhat unkempt village temples outnumber tidy, well-organized monasteries; and that the Buddha, austere and imaged in the posture of meditation (*samadhi*) or dispelling Mara's powerful army (*maravijaya*) is venerated more in the hope of gaining privilege and prestige, material gain, and protection on journeys than in the hope of nibbana.

The apparent contradiction between the highest ideals and goals of Theravada Buddhism and the actual lived tradition in Southeast Asia has long perplexed Western scholars. In his study of Indian religions, Max Weber made a sharp distinction between what he characterized as the "otherworldly mystical" aim of early Indian Buddhism and the world-affirming, practical goals of popular, institutional Buddhism that flourished in the third century C.E. under King Asoka and later Buddhist monarchs.<sup>3</sup> Even recent scholars of Theravada Buddhism have been influenced by Weber's distinction in their studies of Buddhism as a cultural institution and an ethical system.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, the Theravada Buddhism of Southeast Asia, not unlike other great historic religions, defines ideal goals of moral perfection and ultimate self-transformation and the means to attain them, but at the same time, Southeast Asian Buddhism also provides the means by which people cope with day-to-day problems of life as well as a rationale to justify worldly pursuits. Both goals are sanctioned in the writings of the Pali canon, the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> The way to the transcendence of suffering called the Noble Eightfold Path presented in the first public teaching attributed to the Buddha in the discourse known as “Turning the Wheel of the Law” (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*), includes advice appropriate to monks, such as meditation, but also the laity, such as right ethical action. The goals of Buddhism are, in short, both nibbanic and proximate—a better rebirth, an improved social and economic status in this life, and so on; the two are necessarily intertwined. We find in the Pali canon justification for both spiritual poverty and material wealth. Even as the monk or almsperson (*bhikkhu/bhikkhuni*) is enjoined to eschew worldly goods and gain, it is wealth that promotes both individual and social well-being when generously distributed by laypeople unattached to their possessions.<sup>6</sup>

Any broad, holistic analysis of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia should take into account not only its highest ideals and varied practices, but also its seeming contradictions. For example, rituals designed specifically for the benefit of the soul of the deceased seem to undermine the central Theravada doctrine of *anatta* or not-self/not-soul. The student of Theravada Buddhism should keep in mind, however, that the not-self doctrine can be interpreted as sanctioning such monastic pursuits as meditation, whereas the doctrines of *kamma* (Sanskrit, *karma*) rebirth (*samsara*), and merit (*puñña*) justify a wide range of other moral and ritual acts.<sup>7</sup> These are distinctive but related domains within the broader context of the Theravada tradition; they should not be seen as contradictory. In the Pali texts, both ultimate and proximate ideals are promoted. The tradition affirms that the Buddhist path is many forked and, furthermore, that people are at different stages along the path. Explanations that seek somewhat arbitrarily and rigidly to differentiate teaching and practice, the ideal and the actual, run the risk of

sacrificing the interwoven threads of religion as they are culturally embodied to the logic of consistency.

With this admonition in mind, I use the term, “popular tradition,” with some hesitancy; no value judgment is intended. “Popular” in this context does not mean less serious, less worthy, or further removed from the ideal; rather, it refers to Theravada Buddhism as it is commonly perceived, understood, and practiced by the average, traditional Sri Lankan, Burmese, Thai, Cambodian, and Laotian. What defines their sense of religious and cultural identity, the contexts in which this identity is most readily investigated, are rites of passage, festival celebrations, ritual occasions, and behavior as exemplified in traditional stories. One goes to the temple or the temple-monastery (*wat*) to observe many of these activities, hear the teachings as handed down orally from monk to layperson, and view stories depicted in religious art and reenacted in ritual. Institutionally, the religious life of the Theravada Buddhist focuses on the place of public worship, celebration, and discourse. Symbolically, the temple-monastery is not only the “monk’s place”



Figure 1.1. Monastery compound. Wat Kukut, Lamphun, Thailand.

or *sangha-vasa* for the study of the dhamma, but also the “Buddha’s place” or *buddha-vasa* where the Buddha is made present and venerated in images and enshrined relics.

In the following section I shall explore popular Buddhism in Southeast Asia with a focus on Thailand, in these contexts: rites of passage, festival celebrations, and ritual occasions, beginning with ideal behavior or life models personified in traditional myths and legends. The two underlying themes will be: the syncretic nature of popular Buddhism as part of a total religious-cultural system; and the role of religion in enhancing life’s meaning through the integration and interpretation of personal, social, and cosmic dimensions of life.

## IDEAL ACTION

Doctrinally, ideal action in Theravada Buddhism can be described as meritorious action (*puñña-kamma*) or action that does not accrue demerit (*papa-kamma*). At the highest stage of spiritual self-realization, the state of arahantship, one’s actions are totally beyond the power of kamma and rebirth (*samsara*). Terms used to characterize ideal behavior and attitudes are truthfulness (*sacca*), generosity (*dana*), loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), equanimity (*upekkha*), wisdom (*pañña*), and morality (*sila*), to name a few. In both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism these virtues are referred to as “perfections” (*parami* or *paramita*) of character associated with the person of the *bodhisatta* (Sanskrit, *bodhisattva*), one who is on the path to Buddhahood. These perfections are depicted in various ways appropriate to audience and context. They are exemplified in the narratives of moral exemplars, such as Vessantara and Sama who appear in the last ten of the 547 Pali *jataka* tales, other late canonical texts such as the *Cariyā-piṭaka*, the fifth century commentaries of Buddhaghosa and Dhammapala, vernacular narratives, and most important, in the life of the Buddha.<sup>8</sup> Such stories are well known and are one of the principal means through which ideal life models are taught.



Figure 1.2. The main Buddha image at Wat Phra That Hariphunchai (Haripuñjaya), Lamphun, Thailand.

Historically, the Buddha is understood as the founder of the tradition (*sasana*) that is called Buddhism. Beyond that, however, his life story becomes paradigmatic for every devout follower who seeks the same goal of enlightenment/awakening he achieved, especially the Buddhist monk. Before Prince Siddhartha becomes the Buddha, he seeks to discover a deeper meaning to life beyond the inevitable limitations of old age, suffering, and death. He embarks on a quest for a personal knowledge that transcends the inherited traditions of his highborn social class. Departing from the life of a royal householder, he becomes a mendicant, seeking out learned teachers, engaging in the ascetical regimens of the renunciant, and training the mind in contemplative exercises (*samadhi*). Eventually, Siddhartha discovers a higher truth not limited to the conventional, dualistic perceptions of self and other,





Figure 1.3. Temple mural showing Prince Siddhattha's renunciation. Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

or the philosophical constructions of eternalism and nihilism. His profound insight into the non-eternal and non-substantive (*anicca*), causally interdependent and co-coming-into-being (*idappaccayata*) nature of things enabled the future Buddha to overcome the anxiety (*dukkha*) rooted in the awareness of human finitude and of the conditional nature of life. In an ideal sense every follower of the Buddha seeks the truth he achieved at his awakening (*nibbana*). Nibbana is not an abstraction or a mystical, alternative reality but a mode of being-in-the-world. It signifies that way of life as an achievable reality. Although one cannot always ascertain the precise intentions that lead a young man to ordain in the Buddhist monastic order, symbolically his ordination reenacts the Buddha's story.

The central teachings of Theravada Buddhism emerge from the narrative of the Buddha's life. Broadly speaking, the *sutta* literature in the form of the Buddha's dialogues represents episodes linked together as segments of the Buddha's life, like pearls strung on a single strand. Each pearl can be admired in and of itself but only when the pearls are strung together on a thread do



they become a necklace. Similarly, each *sutta* episode conveys particular teachings, but these teachings are embedded in the narrative framework of the Buddha's life. The Buddha's teaching or dhamma is inseparable from the person and life story of the *bodhisatta* who sought to see through the apparent contradictions and sufferings of life to a deeper truth and, having succeeded, taught this truth by word, deed, and the power of example.

When Sri Lankan, Burmese, Thai, Laotian, or Cambodian Buddhists enter a temple or approach a reliquary (*cetiya*, Thai, *chedi*), they are in a sense encountering the Buddha.<sup>9</sup> The reliquary enshrines Buddha relics, regarded as artifacts of his physical being or reminders of his life. Buddha images in varying postures remind the viewer of the Buddha's struggle with the tempter Mara, the Buddha's enlightenment and his teaching; murals visualize in a narrative form long-remembered, embellished episodes from his life. The most commonly seen murals are depictions of his miraculous birth; the four sights or scenes in which he encounters old age, suffering, death, and a wandering truth seeker that prompt him to renounce his princely life; his enlightenment experience under the Bodhi tree; and his first teaching delivered to five ascetics.

Bronze images and murals of the life of the Buddha tell a story that is not merely an inspired tale of the past, but also an ever-present reality. The Buddha represents the possibility of overcoming the blinding ignorance caused by sensory attachments and the attainment of the twin ideals of equanimity and compassion, and personifies the way whereby others may discover this truth for themselves, or by relying on the power of the Awakened One can at least improve their lot in this life or in future lives.

The Buddha's story, however, is not the sole ideal life model.<sup>10</sup> In the Theravada tradition the lives of heroes and saints, particularly in the form of *jataka* tales that tell of the previous lives of the Buddha, embody highly regarded ethical virtues and spiritual perfections. In these stories the reader encounters narrative paradigms rather than scholastic discussions of Buddhist doctrinal ideals. The most celebrated *jataka* is the story of Prince Vessantara, the last life of the Buddha prior to his rebirth as Siddhattha Gotama, who exemplifies the perfection of generosity (*dana*).<sup>11</sup>



Figure 1.4. Temple mural showing Vessantara, Maddi, and their two children walking to the forest hermitage. Wat Luang, Pakse, Champassak Province, Lao PDR.

As the story begins, Vessantara, prince of Sivi, offers his kingdom's white elephant with magical rain-making powers to the neighboring territory of Kalinga to end their drought. The citizens of Sivi, incensed by this generous act that could jeopardize their own well-being, banish Vessantara and his family to the jungle. Before his departure he arranges a *dana* or gift-giving ceremony, wherein he gives away most of his possessions. Upon leaving the capital city, a group of Brahmans request his horse-drawn chariot, which he willingly surrenders, whereupon Vessantara proceeds on foot with his wife and two children into the forest. As we might expect and as the logic of true *dana* requires, soon after Vessantara and his family are happily settled in their

simple jungle hut, the prince is asked to give up his children to serve Jujaka, an elderly Brahman. When Indra appears in human disguise and Vessantara accedes to the god's demand that he surrender his wife, Maddi, the prince's trials come to an end. Having successfully met this ultimate test of generosity—the sacrifice of his wife and children—Vessantara's family is restored to him and he succeeds his father as king of Sivi.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas the Buddha story embodies the ideal of nibbana, the Vessantara story illustrates the doctrine of kamma, which in this instance is a reward for the meritorious act of generosity. Many Western scholars have focused attention on the differences between nibbanic or noble-path action and kammic-merit motivated action. But when these two types of action are placed within these two well-known narrative contexts, the interrelationships become more readily apparent. Both Siddhattha and Vessantara exemplify modes of selflessness symbolized respectively by a quest and a journey; renunciation marks the beginning of a critical threshold or testing period preceding a return or restoration. In the Buddha's case, the threshold state is one of intensive study and ascetical practice from which he emerges transformed as the Buddha. Vessantara's residence in the forest represents a testing ground from which he returns, not only to have his family and possessions restored, but also he is rewarded with an enhanced degree of royal power.

Even with their similarities, the stories do differ. Prince Siddhattha becomes the Buddha, the Awakened One, the *tathagata* who has realized the perfection of the truth (*saccadhamma*). Nonetheless, both stories exemplify the principles of nonattachment and selflessness as time-honored ideal values. In Vessantara's case, the ideal value is generosity, and in the Buddha's case, a total personal transformation designated by the term, not-self (*anatta*), that is, a state in which the individual's self-perception is no longer as an autonomous, self-existent agent, but as part of a dynamic, interrelational process.<sup>13</sup> The two stories also point to the tension in the Theravada tradition between renunciant and householder values. Although the circumstances differ, both Siddhattha and Vessantara sacrifice the duties and responsibilities of their social location as husbands, fathers, and *khattiyas* (noblemen) for a higher goal. The dramatic social tension produced by this conflict is the subject of

the text, *Yasodaravata*, the lament of Siddhattha's wife in reaction to her husband's "desertion" of family, his renunciation of social and political duties, and her consequent status of what amounted to widowhood.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the general tenor of androcentrism in the Pali texts, paradigmatic tales of women, both monastic and lay, also exemplify the perfections of generosity, selflessness, and equanimity.<sup>15</sup> In the Buddhist tradition these virtues are valued regardless of gender. Visakha's selfless sacrifice of her wedding dowry to support the monastic order is as unbounded as that of her male counterpart, Anathapindika.<sup>16</sup> Even though an order of nuns was only grudgingly permitted by the Buddha, and institutionally female monks were subject to the authority of their male counterparts, the poetry of the *Therīgāthā* (Poems of the Nuns) testifies to the high spiritual attainments of female members of the sangha. The following poem is attributed to Sakula, from a Brahman family, who reached arahanthood and was recognized by the Buddha as the foremost among nuns for achieving the "eye of heaven," the psychic power that enabled her to see all worlds far and near:

When I lived in a house  
 I heard a monk's words  
 and saw in those words  
*nirvana*  
 the unchanging state.

I am the one  
 who left son and daughter,  
 money and grain,  
 cut off my hair,  
 and set out into homelessness

Under training on the straight way  
 desire and hatred fell away,  
 along with the obsessions



*Figure 1.5. Temple mural showing laypersons presenting alms food to nuns. Wat Phra That Pha Ngao, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand.*

of the mind  
that combine with them.

After my ordination,  
I remembered  
I had been born before.  
The eye of heaven became clear.

The elements of body and mind  
I saw as other,  
born from a cause,  
subject to decay.  
I have given up the obsessions  
of the mind.  
I am quenched and cool.<sup>17</sup>

Both men and women have the potential to achieve the perfections of selflessness and equanimity, ideals associated with the highest level of spiritual attainment in Buddhism.

The stories of those individuals who have traveled to the highest stages of the Buddhist path appear in narratives written in vernacular languages as well as canonical Pali texts and commentaries. Hagiographic legends of past spiritual exemplars offer moving examples for present belief and practice. Moreover, modern Buddhist saints, meditation masters, and exemplary teachers—both monastic and lay—whose lives are portrayed in written narratives, oral legend, and living personal examples continue to inspire the lives of contemporary practitioners. The well-known Burmese meditation masters, Mahasi Sayadaw, a monk, and U Ba Khin, a layman, are major figures in the promotion of *vipassana* (insight) meditation in Myanmar as well as other Theravada countries and internationally.<sup>18</sup>

The tradition of forest monks, in particular, has contributed significantly to the literature of spiritual virtuosos and hagiographic lore in the modern period as well as the past. In Sri Lanka the Sinhalese monk, Puvakdandave Paññananda, founded a forest hermitage that represented one of the high points of the revival of Buddhism in that country in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> In Thailand the life of the forest monk, Achan Man (Mun) Bhuridatta (1870–1949), as told by one of his disciples, Achan Mahabua (Boowa) Ñanasampanno, has taken on a normative significance for the lives of other forest monks.<sup>20</sup> As the paradigm of the ideal forest-meditation monk, Achan Man has been elevated to the iconic status as the founder of the modern forest tradition in Thai Buddhism. According to James L. Taylor, Achan Man has become a “hagio-legend of national proportions” and, “Although marginal to the formal monastic establishment and to the routinized monastic hierarchy, forest monks . . . are *the mystical core of orthodox Thai religion*. In Thailand, the transformative and integrative process of hagiography turned local legendary recluses into institutionalized national figures.”<sup>21</sup> As is true in other religious traditions, Buddhist monks are venerated not only for their spiritual attainments, but also for the extraordinary powers they are believed to have achieved through ascetical practice

and meditative states of consciousness. This belief has led to a cult of holy monks or saints throughout Buddhist Asia, including Theravada countries. The veneration of material artifacts associated with holy monks—relics, amulets, and images—has become an especially prominent feature of popular belief and practice in Thailand.<sup>22</sup>

Modern exemplars of dedication, perseverance, and spiritual realization include both men and women. Achan Naeb, the daughter of a provincial governor of Suphan Buri Province, Thailand, achieved a national reputation as a noted teacher of *Abhidhamma* and for a method of meditation based on the teachings of the Burmese meditation master, Sunlun Sayadaw.<sup>23</sup> By the 1970s, approximately twenty major and minor centers in central Thailand under her inspiring leadership were teaching meditation to both monks and laity, and her Buddhist Studies Research Center at Wat Sutat, also known as the Golden Mount Temple in Bangkok, received the honor of royal patronage. In Ratchaburi Province, Upasika Kee Nanayon (1901–1978), who took the *nom de plume*, Kor Khao-suan-luang, from the name of the forested hill where she established a women’s center for practicing the dhamma, became one of the foremost women teachers of meditation in Thailand. Known for her simple way of life and the direct style of her teaching, many of her talks were transcribed and printed for free distribution, including the following translated excerpt from the collection, *Looking Inward: Observations on the Art of Meditation*:

The Buddha taught that we are to know with our own hearts and minds. Even though there are many, many words and phrases coined to explain the Dhamma, we need focus only on the things we can know and see, extinguish and let go right at each moment of the immediate present—better than taking on a lot of other things. Once we can read and comprehend our inner awareness, we’ll be struck deep within us that the Buddha awakened to the truth right here in the heart. His truth is truly the language of the heart.

When they translate the Dhamma in all sorts of ways, it becomes something ordinary. But if you keep close and careful watch right at the heart and mind, you’ll be able to see clearly, to let go, to put down your burdens. If you don’t





Figure 1.6. Phra Malai teaching men and women about the punishments of hell and the rewards of heaven. Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, Lamphun, Thailand.

know right here, your knowledge will send out all sorts of branches, turning into thought-formations with all sorts of meanings in line with conventional labels—all of them short of the mark.

If you know right at your inner awareness and make it your constant stance, there's nothing at all: no need to take hold of anything, no need to label anything, no need to give anything names. Right where craving arises right there it disbands: That's where you'll know what *nibbana* is like . . . "Nibbana is simply this disbanding of craving." That's what the Buddha stressed over and over again.<sup>24</sup>

Stories, both traditional and modern, also illustrate different facets of morally objectionable, as well as spiritually praiseworthy behavior with their respective punishments or rewards. By way of contrast, they offer a counterpoint to ideal exemplars. A prime negative example is the evil Devadatta. Motivated by selfish jealousy, Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin,





*Figure 1.7. Monk seated on a preaching chair. Chiang Mai, Thailand.*

attempts to create a schism in the monastic order and even tries to kill the Buddha. For such maleficent deeds he is reborn in hell.<sup>25</sup> Other tales illustrate the punishments for violating the five moral precepts or training rules fundamental to the normative ethical system of popular Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia. The five moral precepts are prohibitions against: taking life, stealing, lying, committing adultery, and drinking intoxicants. One such tale tells of the pious monk, Phra Malai, who is given the opportunity to visit the Buddhist hells, populated by those who have broken the precepts, as well as the heavens, enjoyed by those who have faithfully kept them.<sup>26</sup> After these visits, Phra Malai instructs humankind about future rewards and punishments for present actions. One can view the graphic details of Phra Malai episodes from this popular story on temple walls, not for a model of ideal behavior, as in the case of the Buddha and Vessantara, but as a vivid illustration of the consequences for failure to follow the Buddhist moral code.

Theravada Buddhism teaches the ideals of selflessness, wisdom, and compassion that are identified with the life of the Buddha, saintly monks, and observant laity. It also establishes normative moral principles and rules necessary for social harmony. These rules are reinforced by the story of Phra Malai, tales from the *Dhammapada* commentary (*Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*), and canonical *suttas* such as the *Sigālaka*. In this *sutta*, the Buddha teaches a Brahman youth, Sigalaka, about the duties and responsibilities that should obtain between parent and child, husband and wife, teacher and student, friends, servants and masters, mendicants and lay supporters (see appendix 1). However, Southeast Asian Buddhism encompasses more than just the individual and social ideals represented by the Buddha, Sakula, Vessantara, Visakha, Phra Malai, and Sigalaka; it constructs an ethic of human flourishing within a complex cosmology of divine, human, and subhuman beings.<sup>27</sup>

Popular Buddhist moral tales assume an inherent interrelationship among these various cosmological levels and states of existence. As the following brief narrative from the *Cariyāpīṭaka* (Basket of Conduct) illustrates, the dramatis personae of these moral fables are often animals like monkeys, deer, buffalo, fish, *yakkhas* (demons), and *nagas* (serpents) as well as human beings. The following story illustrates the perfection of moral virtue (*sīla*). In the tale, a buffalo upholds the precept against taking the life of a sentient being by controlling its anger, which is occasioned by social humiliation and ritual pollution.

When I was a buffalo roaming in a forest . . . strong, large, terrifying to behold . . . Wandering about in the huge forest I saw a favourable place. Going to that place I stood and I lay down. Then an evil, foul, nimble monkey came there and urinated and defecated over my shoulder, forehead and eyebrows. And on one day, even on a second, a third and a fourth too, he polluted me. All the time I was distressed by him. A *yakkha*, seeing my distress, said this to me, ‘Kill that vile evil one with horns and hoofs.’ This spoken, I then said to the *yakkha*, ‘How is it that you (would) besmear me with a carcass, evil and foul?’ If I were to be angry with him, from that I would become more degraded than him; and morality [*sīla*] might be violated by me and wise

men might censure me. Better indeed is death through (leading a life of) purity than a life subject to disdain. How will I, even for the sake of life, do an injury to another?<sup>28</sup>

The moral of this folkloric tale is conveyed, in part, through the medium of humor. In modern Western society there is a tendency to see religion as a sober and serious enterprise devoid of humor, but that is not the case for traditional, oral-based religious instruction in Buddhist Southeast Asia. Lay storytellers and even monk-preachers often used humor—occasionally ribald—to keep the attention of their audience.

### RITUAL OCCASIONS, MERIT, AND THE APPROPRIATION OF POWER

Buddhist rituals can be classified in various ways. Melford Spiro characterizes Theravada ritual action in Myanmar in terms of a fourfold typology: commemorative, expressive, instrumental, and expiatory.<sup>29</sup> Commemorative ritual is performed in remembrance of historical, legendary, or mythological events; expressive ritual serves to manifest emotions and sentiments felt toward objects of reverence, such as the Buddha, his teaching, and the monastic order; instrumental ritual aims to achieve some goal in this life or in future lives; expiatory ritual is performed to atone for misdeeds.<sup>30</sup> Like most religious phenomena, rituals can be interpreted on several levels. Spiro's useful analysis should not be regarded as definitive nor should these categories be construed as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, although rituals vary in nature, function, and intent, Theravada rituals in Southeast Asia often appear calculated to address a wide spectrum of beneficent and malevolent powers.

Broadly speaking, these powers can be defined as either Buddhist or non-Buddhist. The Buddhist symbols operative in various ritual contexts are most often associated with the Buddha himself, images of the Buddha, his relics enshrined in reliquary mounds or *cetiya*, and Buddha amulets. Symbols associated with individual Buddhist monks or nuns reputed to be particularly

holy are an important extension of these objects. The charismatic power ascribed to individual monks derive, in part, from the power represented by the Buddha because monks follow his dhamma; even more so, monks' charisma stems from their reputed ability to foresee the future, to heal psychic and physical maladies, and exhibit other extraordinary powers associated with trance states (*jhana*). As a consequence, images, relics, and amulets of famous monks are venerated in and of themselves.<sup>31</sup>

On the level of popular cult, the nonphysical, nibbanic values and ideals represented by the Buddha, his teachings, and the Buddhist sangha assume specific physical or material characteristics. Even the Buddha's teaching has a physical representation in the material form of inscribed palm leaf texts. Because of their association with the Buddha's teaching, palm leaf manuscripts become objects of power in their own right. The term, "sacred text," in this sense refers not only to its content but also to the text as a material object of sacred power.

Scholars have classified symbols to which special powers are ascribed within ritual contexts—which may or may not be overtly Buddhist—as animistic or Brahmanistic.<sup>32</sup> They include Brahmanical deities such as Indra (Sakka in the Pali canon) and Vishnu who may be invoked to guard a specific site or be present upon the occasion of a Buddhist ceremony; a pantheon of Hindu gods in Sri Lanka that include Vishnu and Kataragama;<sup>33</sup> and other indigenous deities and spirits that include the *nats* in Burma<sup>34</sup> and the *chao* and *phi* in Thailand and Laos.<sup>35</sup>

A syncretic flavor imbues most popular festivals, ceremonies, and rituals in Theravada Southeast Asia. In some, such as the Visakha Puja festival celebrating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death, the Buddhist element dominates. But Buddhist monks are invited to chant protective *suttas* (*paritta*) at a variety of rituals, ranging from house dedications to weddings, whose underlying significance seems remote from the Buddhist ideals of self-transforming knowledge.<sup>36</sup> If religious ritual is interpreted as a system for gaining access to a broad range of powers constituted within a cosmology of human, superhuman, and subhuman realms, then the ritual context itself determines its precise meaning rather than a predetermined

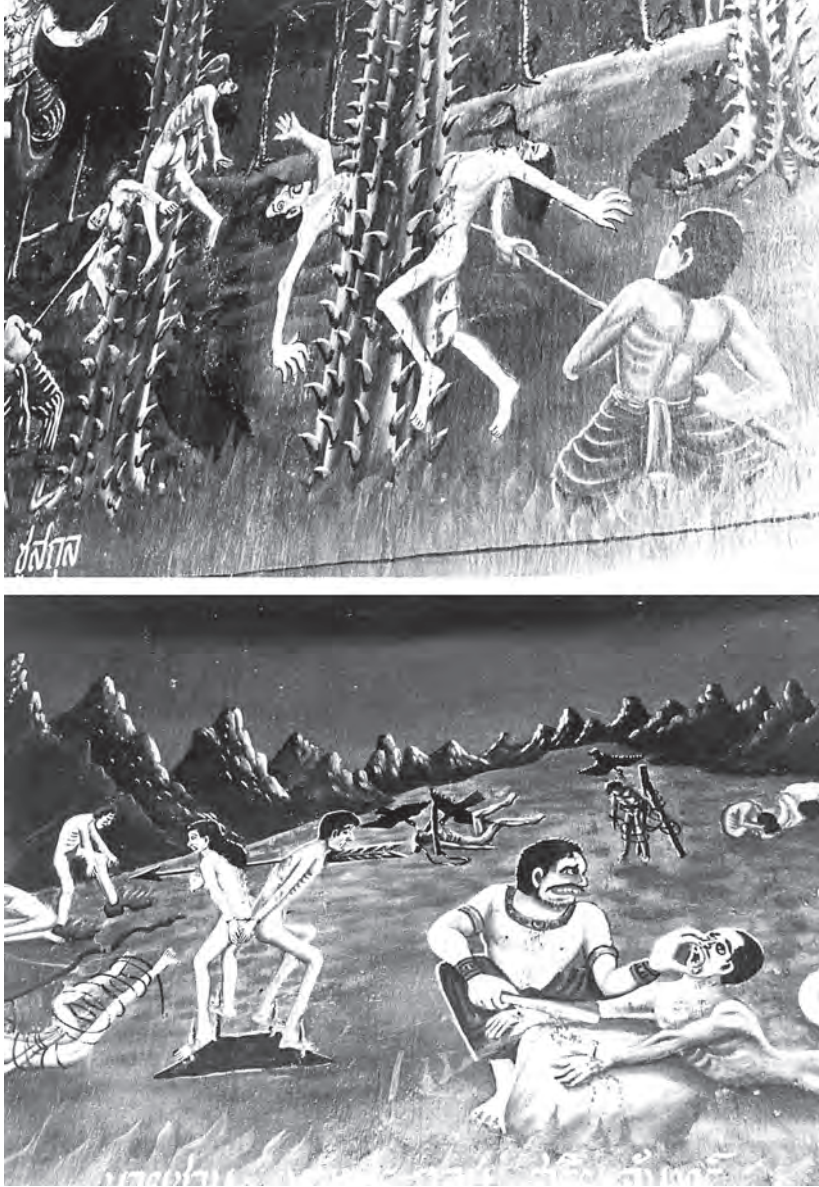


Figure 1.8. Monks on their morning alms rounds (*pindapata*).

definition of what is considered as Buddhist or non-Buddhist (e.g., animistic or Brahmanical).

In gaining access to power, Buddhist ritual in Southeast Asia functions in two primary ways: reciprocal exchange and appropriation. Reciprocal exchange emerges from the donor-recipient relationship found in merit-making rituals. The layperson-donor offers material gifts for the benefit of the monastic order. In return, the virtuous power of the sangha engenders a spiritual reward of merit (*puñña*), thereby enhancing the donor's balance of *kamma*/*karma*, which in turn, affects the status of the person's rebirth on the cosmic scale. All ritual situations, in which presentations are made to the monastic order, function in this way. These include acts as frequent and informal as giving food to monks on their morning alms rounds (*pindapata*), to the annual and formal presentation of new robes and other gifts to the sangha at the end of the monsoon rains retreat after the October full-moon day. Even though the form of merit-making rituals in Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia varies greatly, the structure of reciprocal exchange remains a constant.<sup>37</sup>





*Figure 1.9. Buddhist hells. Punishment for breaking the precepts. Phra Malai murals. Wat Hariphunchai, Lamphun, Thailand.*

Merit making links the cosmology of Theravada Buddhism in graphic and practical terms to the daily lives of the people. Recall, for example, the story of the pious monk, Phra Malai, who teaches human beings the heavenly rewards for good deeds and the grim consequences of punishment in hell for evil ones. Late canonical texts, such as the *Vimānavatthu* (Stories of the Heavenly Mansions) and the *Petavatthu* (Stories of the Departed Ghosts), commentaries (*atthakatha*), and many tales in the vernacular literature of Southeast Asia reinforce the future negative and positive results of behavior in this life. The following passage from the *Petavatthu* provides a sample of the graphic horrors of this realm of punishment. The *petas* are departed spirits who occupy one of the levels of Buddhist hell (*niraya*). Contemplating their condition, often depicted in illustrated manuscripts or temple murals, the *petas* presumptively encourage a person to behave in a moral way or suffer the punishment of hell:

“You have a beautiful, heavenly complexion . . . [said the venerable monk, Narada] . . . Yet worms are devouring your mouth which has a putrid odour; what act did you commit of yore?”

The [male] Peta replied: “A monk I was, wicked and of ill speech; though fitted for austerity, I was unrestrained with my mouth; I obtained my complexion with austerity and a putrid mouth on account of my slander.”<sup>38</sup>

[The venerable monk, Sariputta, spoke to a female Peti who appeared to him at night] “Naked and of hideous appearance are you, emaciated and with prominent veins. You thin one, with your ribs standing out, now who are you, you who are here?”

The Peti [replies]: “I, venerable sir, am a peti, a wretched denizen of Yama’s world; since I had done a wicked deed, I went from here to the world of the *petas*.”

Sariputta [asks]: “. . . Because of what act have you gone hence to the world of the *petas*?”

“Reverend sir [she replies], I did not have compassionate relatives, father and mother, or even other kinsmen who would urge me, saying, Give, with devotion in your heart, a gift to recluses and brahmins.”

“From that time for five hundred years in this form I have been wandering, naked, consumed by hunger and thirst; this is the fruit of my wicked deed.”<sup>39</sup>

Close observation of other Southeast Asian religious rituals reveals slightly different mechanisms for appropriating the power of the religious object: a pilgrimage to a famous *cetiya* containing a Buddha relic; paying respects to a Buddha image with holy water lustrations during the April lunar New Year celebration; receiving and wearing an amulet containing the charred hair of a holy monk; “calling” or invoking spirits at times of crisis or life transitions; making offerings to the deities of the four directions, the zenith, and nadir—all of these ritual acts aim at appropriating power, whether represented by the Buddha or other kinds of divine or demonic beings. Of course, elements of exchange can be found in these rituals as well. A gift is given, an offering is made, a sum of money is donated in the expectation of some kind of return, varying from an immediate and practical benefit to a general sense of well-being or even spiritual attainment.<sup>40</sup> The structure of these rituals, however, mirrors less clearly the reciprocal nature basic to all merit-making exchanges.

In the remainder of this analysis of Buddhist ritual in Southeast Asia, I shall examine three different ceremonies that exemplify and justify this interpretation of ritual reciprocal exchange and appropriation of power. The first of these ceremonies is the presentation of new robes at the end of the monsoon rains retreat; the second is the consecration of a new Buddha image; and the third is the annual preaching of the *Vessantara Jātaka*.

### *Kathina* Ceremony Presentation of Robes at the End of the Rains Retreat

The presentation of new robes and other gifts at the end of the monastic rains retreat takes its name, *kathina*, from the uniquely fashioned robes offered on that occasion.<sup>41</sup> This ceremony takes place during the month immediately following the full moon sabbath (*uposatha*) day in October. According to the



*Mahāvagga* of the Theravada Book of Discipline (*Vinaya Piṭaka*), during a three-month period from mid-July to mid-October monks were required to adopt a settled residence and were not permitted to leave this encampment except under special conditions. Under these restrictions the mendicant nature of the Buddhist monkhood began to change. In particular, customs and practices of a collective life gradually emerged that included the recitation of a set of disciplinary rules (*patimokkha*) and the distribution of robes (*kathina*).<sup>42</sup> These ceremonies continue to this day, evolving from culture to culture as the Theravada form of Buddhism from the Sinhalese Mahavihara monastic lineage became dominant not only in Sri Lanka but won the favor of ruling monarchs in Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Today in Buddhist Southeast Asia the *kathina* ceremony provides one of the most popular occasions for merit making. In village society this event usually involves the entire community, and in towns the monastery “parish” participates as a communal group.

The *kathina* ceremony may last from one to three days. Nearly every family in the community or parish will be involved in the preparation of food and other material gifts offered to the monks at a particular monastery, however, the principal donor may come from another village, town, or region. This custom originates from the traditional view that greater merit accrues when the identity of the donor is unknown to the local sangha. In Thailand today this practice may also result from the fact that upcountry monasteries are considered to be closer to the monastic ideal than urban ones. For this reason, affluent patrons from cities often sponsor *kathinas* in rural areas. Most of the *kathina* ceremonies I witnessed followed this pattern. In one of the most memorable of these occasions, the fabric for a set of robes was completely spun, woven, and sewn at the monastery within a twenty-four hour period and presented to the abbot of a rural northern Thai monastery noted for his austerity and skill in meditation. Dozens of women were paid to card, spin, weave, and sew in temporary quarters especially built for the occasion. In this particular instance, the sponsor was a wealthy businesswoman from Chiang Mai, the largest city in northern Thailand.



Figure 1.10. Rains retreat (*kathina*) procession. Keng Tung, Shan State, Myanmar.

The actual presentation of robes, money, and other offerings for the livelihood of the monks is the highlight of the *kathina*. It frequently involves a procession that varies in size and constituency according to the nature of the community. Included might be musical groups with traditional instruments—drums, cymbals, and horns—or school bands playing Western musical instruments. Traditional dancers may be part of the processional entertainment and the marchers often wear traditional northern dress. In addition to the *kathina* robes, symbolically the most important gift presented to the monastic order at this time, is a “wishing tree” with paper currency and other small gifts attached. The wishing tree, which occupies a place of honor in the procession, is often in the pyramidal shape of a palace; it represents the hope of the villagers that the merit they accrue in this celebration will enable them to live in a palatial heavenly abode in some future lifetime.<sup>43</sup> Practically speaking, the money and gifts form the primary source of material support for the monastery.

The procession wends its way through the streets of the village until it comes to the monastery compound. The participants file into the main assembly hall (*vihara*) bearing gifts of robes, the wishing tree, and other palanquins filled with offerings of soap, towels, writing materials, canned food, and other practical items for the monks' use. The ceremony begins, as do most meetings of monks and laypeople, with the congregation taking refuge in the Three Gems—the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. Following the monks' lead, they repeat in Pali the five basic precepts of Buddhist lay life: not to kill, steal, lie, engage in illicit sexual acts, or ingest intoxicants.

Next, the lay leader of the congregation conducts the ritual of the presentation of gifts to the entire monastic community, which are received by the abbot on their behalf. The chief donor is accorded the privilege of offering the first set of robes to the gathered monks after he/she first symbolically offers them to a large Buddha image that dominates the assembly hall. The ceremony concludes after the monks and novices receive their new robes and intone the following blessing:

May all blessings be yours; may all the gods (*deva*) protect you.  
 By the power of all the Buddhas, may all happiness be yours forever.  
 May all blessings be yours; may all the gods protect you.  
 By the power of all the Dhammas, may all happiness be yours forever.  
 May all blessings be yours; may all the gods protect you.  
 By the power of all the Sanghas, may all happiness be yours forever.<sup>44</sup>

A reciprocal transaction has just taken place. In return for the offerings presented to the monastic order, the laypeople receive a spiritual blessing. In the calculus of merit making, the participants hope for a reward in a future life brought about by the power of this good deed.

Why is this particular ritual of exchange so important? All merit-making rituals are rooted in the symbolic role of the monastic order as mediator of the power represented by the Buddha, a power not only of supreme enlightenment but also supernatural attainments. By the end of the rains retreat the sangha has achieved a special potency due to the fact that in the previous



Figure 1.11. Monks chanting. Wat Chetuphon, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

three months the monks have followed a more rigorous regime than usual that includes restricted travel, intensive study, and meditation. The *kathina* ceremony serves as the means by which the laity gains access to this enhanced potency and power. For this reason the ceremony is especially meritorious and, furthermore, may explain why possession of the *kathina* robes confers on Burmese monks the privilege of leaving the monastery without securing the abbot's permission.<sup>45</sup> The *kathina* robe, therefore, represents not only a particular period of tenure and training in the monastic order, but also the spiritual power inherent in "wearing the robe."

### Consecration of a Buddha Image

A second ceremony that provides insight into the significance of the transactional nature of Theravada Buddhist ritual in Southeast Asia is the consecration of a Buddha image.<sup>46</sup> Nearly all Theravada rituals that take place at the

monastery occur in an assembly hall containing a Buddha image. The image resides on an elevated dais or altar, rising higher in elevation than either the monks who sit on a raised platform or the laity who sit on the floor. In Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia during most consecration ceremonies, Pali texts and ritual chants composed in Pali or vernacular languages of the area will be chanted by the monks, who at the same time, hold a sacred thread (*sai siñcana*) attached to the Buddha image. This thread functions as a conduit of the power residing in the image that is magically released by the chant. In addition to being the visual focus of attention for any congregation performing a ritual act in the hall, offerings of incense, candles, and flowers are presented before the image. When asked about the meaning of the offerings placed before a Buddha image, most devotees reply that these gifts are given out of respect to the memory of the Buddha of which the image is a reminder, that is, the offerings are not given to the image itself. Such an interpretation coincides with the orthodox Theravada view that discourages superhuman or magical interpretations of the Buddha's power. The ceremony in which a Buddha image is consecrated, however, appears to the observer to contradict such an interpretation.

In Theravada Buddhist cultures a Buddha image installed in an assembly hall must be formally consecrated. Until that act takes place, the statue is considered decorative or symbolic because it lacks a sacred or iconic status. The consecration ceremony brings the image to life or empowers it, thereby transforming it from a mere figurative symbol of the founder to a cult icon of spiritual and religious potency. After consecration, an image is worthy of veneration, an object to which offerings are made not simply out of respect for the memory of a religious founder, but with the expectation that an efficacious consequence will follow. Although one might theorize on psychological grounds that making an offering to a representation of a divine being or a saint entails the hope of some sort of material reward or personal benefit, firsthand knowledge of an image consecration ritual provides us with specific cultural information regarding the nature of this expectation and its fulfillment.<sup>47</sup>

An image consecration ritual involves two primary elements: instructing the image and charging it with power. In Thailand and Laos, the ceremony proper, which may be part of a larger celebration, generally lasts one full night, beginning at dusk and ending at dawn of the following day with the opening of the eyes of the Buddha image. Because the details of image consecrations differ rather significantly among Theravada cultures, the following description relies primarily on a ceremony I witnessed in northern Thailand.

The image consecration ritual, held at a rural monastery near the town of Lamphun, was the occasion of several days of festivities that served the dual purpose of community celebration and fund raising to finance a new monastery building. The ceremony took place in the assembly hall where the image was to be installed. At dusk the monks and novices from the monastery and distinguished monks and ecclesiastical leaders invited from the district and province began chanting before a congregation of laymen and women that filled the hall. After taking refuge in the Three Gems (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) and taking the precepts (*pañca sila*), the evening chanting began with selections from the *paritta* or protection *suttas*. These protection *suttas* were consolidated as the core body of ritual texts by the Sinhalese Mahavihara monastic tradition of Theravada Buddhism and have been widely used as the basis of most chanting ceremonies in Southeast Asian Buddhism since the fourteenth century.

Piyadassi Thera, a noted Sinhalese monk, suggests that the twenty-four standard *paritta* discourses from the five collections of Pali *sutta* texts constitute a dhamma handbook for newly ordained novice monks.<sup>48</sup> A practical argument for their prominence as ritual texts, therefore, is that in the tradition of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, this group of texts was the most widely memorized. Beyond this practical use, however, Piyadassi offers four doctrinal explanations for the efficacy of *paritta* texts based on the principle that, “paritta recital produces mental well-being in those who listen to them with intelligence, and have confidence in the truth of the Buddha’s words.”<sup>49</sup> He asserts that the texts establish the hearer in the power of the Buddha’s dhamma; that because many of the discourses describe the virtuous life, they establish the hearer in a virtuous state of mind; that





Figure 1.12. Buddha image consecration ritual. Wat San Pa Yang Luang, Lamphun, Thailand.

the monks who chant *paritta* reflect the compassion of the Buddha for all sentient beings, thereby establishing the hearers in the power of love; and, finally, that the power of the sound of the chant helps to create both mental and physical harmony.<sup>50</sup>

Piyadassi's modern, rational explanation of the meaning of *paritta* recital contrasts with the widely held belief among laypeople that the efficacy of *paritta* chant will bring about particular ends, such as curing physical illness. Even in the Pali texts, the Buddha is said to have approved chanting the *Karaṇīyamettā Sutta* to ward off evil spirits, and chanting the *Āṅgulimāla Paritta*, which was specifically sanctioned to ease a difficult childbirth.

With the exception of the two hours between three and five A.M. while those in attendance rested or slept, the ceremony at the village monastery is devoted to a sequence of chanting, sermons recounting the life of the Buddha, and periods of meditation. During the night an air of relaxed informality prevails in an otherwise serious affair as both monks and laity wander in

and out of the hall. In addition to the *paritta*, canonical and non-canonical texts are recited and preached that recount the life of the Prince Siddhattha, his attainments during the three watches of the night of the future Buddha's awakening, and his miraculous attributes and powers. The chanting concludes at dawn with the recitation of the Buddha's first teaching (*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*) while a senior monk removes a cone-shaped white cloth covering the head of the image and beeswax from the image's eyes.

Throughout the night of the ritual, the image being consecrated resides on a raised platform, its head shrouded in white cloth and eyes covered with beeswax. The act of covering the head symbolizes the future Buddha's withdrawal from the householder life in order to pursue a regimen leading to nibbana. During the consecration ritual a similar transformation takes place that results in the creation of a cult icon representing the Buddha. To become the Buddha, the image is instructed in the *tathagata's* personal history, imbued with his supernatural attainments, and taught the dhamma. The chanting of the monks and the sermons preached both instruct and empower the image as the life history of the Buddha is being recited.

Prior to the ceremony various gifts for the image were placed before it, including the five royal insignia (fan, crown, bowl, staff, and sandals), the eight requisites of a monk symbolized by a begging bowl and monastic robes, a small replica of the Bodhi tree, and a cushion of *kusha* grass. These elements serve as material illustrations of the narrative being recited: the tale of the royal prince who renounces the householder's life, gains special powers through his training and ascetic practices, and finally attains enlightenment seated on a cushion of *kusha* grass beneath the Bodhi tree.

Two aspects of the ceremony deserve special mention. While the *Buddha Abhiseka* (Buddha image consecration) text is being chanted, a group of nine monks sit in a semicircle around the image meditating in rapt concentration. Before them are placed monks' alms bowls from which sacred cords extend to the Buddha image. It is believed that while the monks meditate, they project their own charismatic powers into the image via the sacred cord, which further enhances the image's potency.



A second noteworthy element is a ritual reenactment of an event in the legend of the Buddha's spiritual quest that occurs just before his awakening (nibbana). In the early morning hours, a honey-sweetened milk-rice mixture is prepared by a group of female renunciants (Thai, *mae chi*) within a specially consecrated area in the compound adjacent to the assembly hall. After the mixture is divided and placed into forty-nine small bowls, monks, nuns, and laypeople offer them to the image in reenactment of a food offering to the future Buddha prior to his nibbana. On the eve of Prince Siddhartha's awakening, Sujata, a highborn young married woman, presents him with a special mixture of honey-sweetened milk-rice in a golden bowl. After the future Buddha divides the rice into forty-nine small balls, he consumes it. "Now that was the only food he had for forty-nine days, during the seven times seven days he spent, after he became a Buddha, at the foot of the Tree of Enlightenment."<sup>51</sup>

In Myanmar, Sujata's offering is commemorated in a sumptuous merit-making feast held annually on the first full-moon day after the end of the rains retreat. Shway Yoe (Sir James George Scott) gives an account of the fete as celebrated in the late nineteenth century: "Mountains of cooked rice send out spurs of beef and pork, with flat lands of dried fish and outlying peaks of roasted ducks and fowls . . . Chinese patties of sugar and fat pork, plates full of fried silkworms . . . salt-pickled ginger and fried garlic, and a variety of other dishes beyond the ken of occidental cookery, abound. . ."<sup>52</sup>

As the first rays of dawn appear on the eastern horizon, a monk removes the white cloth hood and beeswax covering the head and eyes of the image. This act symbolizes the Buddha's enlightenment and also indicates the completion of the training and empowerment of the image. Three small mirrors, which previously had faced the image during the ritual, are then turned to face outward. The mirrors represent the three "superordinate knowledges" achieved by the Buddha: knowledge of his former lives; knowledge of the passing away and rebirth of all beings; knowledge of the destruction of the cause of suffering (i.e., the moral intoxicants or *asava*).<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, the monks intone three chants: the Buddha's victory over suffering; his comprehension of the interdependent, co-arising nature of reality (*paticca-samuppada*); and

his first teaching, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. This final sequence of chants begins with the *Buddha Abhiseka Maṅgala Udāna Kathā* (Auspicious Verses of the Buddha Image Consecration):

Through many a birth I wandered in *samsara*,  
 Seeing, but not finding, the builder of the house.  
 Sorrowful is birth again and again.  
 O house-builder! Thou art seen.  
 Thou shalt build no house again. All thy rafters are broken,  
 thy ridge-pole is shattered.  
 My mind has attained the unconditioned,  
 achieved is the end of craving.<sup>54</sup>

The image consecration ceremony dramatizes one of the fundamental polarities in Theravada Buddhism, and also provides insight into the meaning of the syncretic reciprocity that characterizes Theravada merit-making rituals. This polarity is between virtuous wisdom and power. The Buddha embodies wisdom and virtuous perfections, but he is also endowed with supernatural powers such as the divine eye and divine ear. This polarity manifests itself in a variety of ways throughout the Buddhist tradition. For example, the Theravada chronicles of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia record numerous miraculous feats of the Buddha, among them his supernatural ability to travel to these countries, an achievement that prepares the way for the suzerainty of subsequent Buddhist monarchs. Yet, in seeming contrast to stories of his miraculous feats, in other texts the Buddha cautions his followers against displays of supernatural power even as he triumphs over yogic miracle workers with his dhamma or teaching. In Theravada countries these paradoxical qualities applied to the Buddha are embodied in the couplet, the Buddha's "power and virtue." The consecration of a Buddha image provides a particularly rich context for understanding the nature of the interrelationship between these two qualities, especially within the context of Buddhist ritual.

How are we to understand the intentionality behind the offerings of incense, flowers, and candles made to a Buddha image on ritual occasions?

Although we do an injustice to the tradition to ignore the claim that such offerings honor the memory of the teacher-founder, yet we cannot overlook the belief that the devotee expects to receive some sort of boon or benefit from the image because the image has special powers to grant the wishes of the devotee. A similar dynamic lies behind all merit-making rituals. By making an offering, especially a generous one, the donor hopes to elicit a reciprocal response from the power infused into the Buddha image. Knowledge of the consecration ritual gives us insight into the contextual meaning of a Buddha image and, hence, enriches our understanding that virtually all Theravada Buddhist rituals conducted in front of the image, such as the *kathina* ceremony, are mechanisms of reciprocity and appropriation of power.

We now have a much better comprehension of the richly textured, multivalent nature of Theravada Buddhist ritual. The *kathina* ceremony can be understood in a literal sense as an annual renewal and replenishment of monks' robes and other material requisites for the monastic order. But a single interpretation ignores other levels of meaning that include the sangha's mediating role between the Buddha and the laity, the special sanctity ascribed to the monastic order following the rains retreat period, and as we have seen in our analysis of the Buddha image consecration ceremony, the place of Buddha images in the reciprocal transfer and appropriation of power constitutive of merit-making rituals.

Thus far, the discussion has not focused on the syncretic nature of Theravada Buddhist ritual in Southeast Asia, per se. Some rituals, like the presentation of *kathina* robes seem relatively free of specific non-Buddhist elements while others, such as the image consecration ceremony, traditionally include offerings to the guardians of the four quarters, the zenith, and the nadir. A. K. Coomaraswamy argues, moreover, that the ritual associated with opening the eyes of a Buddha image in Sri Lanka is fundamentally Hindu in character.<sup>55</sup> Other rites performed at such auspicious occasions as a career change, a fifth cycle (sixty years) birthday celebration, or a wedding (see the Rites of Passage section in part 1) appear to reflect an animistic mentality despite the presence of Buddhist monks and the role they play in the ceremony.<sup>56</sup> These rituals are designed to appeal to and appease protective spirits or deities

that reflect more of an animistic or Brahmanical religious subculture than normative Theravada teachings. The presence of Buddhist monks at these passage rites, often to chant *paritta* texts, adds to but does not supplant the varied cultural meanings of the event.

### Preaching the *Vessantara Jātaka* (*Desanā Mahājāti*)

Throughout Theravada Southeast Asian cultures the story of Prince Vessantara is rivaled in popularity only by Prince Siddhattha's journey to Buddhahood. The *Vessantara Jātaka* has been translated into the major Southeast Asian vernacular languages with minor changes in the text, and virtually all monastery libraries contain one or more copies in their palm leaf manuscript collection.

How can we account for the enduring popularity of this legend? Explanations might include the following: Vessantara culminates the collection of 547 canonical *jataka* stories, the penultimate appearance of the *bodhisatta* as Prince Siddhattha; the generous prince embodies the virtue of *dana* that completes the list of ten *bodhisatta* virtues represented in the last ten *jataka* stories; Vessantara embodies a positive moral virtue central to the Theravada ethical tradition; and he becomes the paradigm of the meritorious consequence of giving, especially when generosity is directed toward the bhikkhu sangha. These explanations omit the possibility that the story's popularity developed, at least in part, because in many Theravada cultures Vessantara's life came to be honored in an elaborate, ritualized preaching of the *jataka* tale. Indeed, in northeastern Thailand, the ceremonial preaching of the story of Prince Vessantara has traditionally been the "grandest merit-making ceremony in the village."<sup>57</sup> The ceremony that commemorates Prince Vessantara, not unlike the Buddha image consecration ritual, synthesizes the highest moral-spiritual ideals of Theravada Buddhism with the practical theory of merit making and a consequentialist view of the efficacy of ritual action.<sup>58</sup> Because the general outline of the legend of Prince Vessantara's journey from the capital city of Sivi to a forest hermitage and his subsequent return and reward for his



Figure 1.13. Lay devotees listening to the preaching of the *Vessantara Jātaka*. Wat Luang, Pakse, Champassak Province, Lao PDR.

selfless generosity was given earlier, let us now look briefly at the ceremony itself. Although favorite chapters or sections of the *Vessantara Jātaka* may be preached for special occasions any time during the year, the preaching of the entire thirteen chapters of the Thai version of the story, the *Desanā Mahājāti*, traditionally occurs after the end of the monastic rains retreat, when there is the annual lull in the traditional village agricultural cycle between rice planting and harvest.

In northern Thailand the celebration customarily lasts for two or three days during the twelfth lunar month (early November).<sup>59</sup> The first day focuses on merit making on behalf of deceased teachers, parents, and other relatives. The story of Phra Malai's visit to the hells and heavens and his subsequent moral admonitions to lay devotees is traditionally preached on this day. The throngs of people crowding the monasteries to hear the sermons mill about the monastery compound, circumambulating the assembly hall and *cetiya*. They may carry small "boats" made of banana stalks containing incense,

flowers, small candles, grains of sticky rice, and a coin or two. After spending some time at the monastery they make their way to a nearby river or pond. There, lighting the incense and candles, young and old, men and women, set their small boats afloat as an offering to the spirits of deceased relatives and friends (see the section, Festival of the Floating Boats).

The second day of the celebration focuses on preaching the story of Prince Vessantara. At the entrance to the monastery lay devotees construct a “forest gateway” from banana tree stalks. They may also demarcate a path to the assembly hall with a “royal fence” (Thai, *rajawat*), which is named for the mountain where Prince Vessantara’s hermitage was located. The pathway may be constructed in the form of a maze or labyrinth, suggesting that Vessantara’s selfless generosity confounds conventional expectations and that concentration and effort are required to attain such moral perfection. The pillars of the assembly hall are decorated with stalks of banana trees and sugar cane to recreate a forest-like atmosphere. Thirteen scenes from the *jataka* tale identifying each chapter are painted on the walls or hung as cloth banners created especially for this occasion.

Beginning with the recitation of a one thousand-verse summary of the tale in Pali, monks expressly trained to chant one of the thirteen chapters of the Thai version of the *jataka* continue the ritual preaching of the story. Each chapter may end with a musical interlude or the preacher may punctuate his recitation with a distinctive ornamented vocalization at the beginning, middle, and end followed by a summary of that part of the text and words of homage to his teachers and the Triple Gem. This section varies according to each monk’s preaching ability and is the part where he can display his own creative vocal style. If the listeners are impressed, they may pass around a silver bowl to collect an additional offering for the monk.<sup>60</sup> The audience may request encores, particularly when a skilled, charismatic preacher recites the fifth chapter with its ribald description of the aged Brahman, Jujaka, being cajoled by his young, shrewish wife to secure Vessantara’s children to be her servants.

Each chapter of the *jataka* has one or more lay sponsors. They invite one of their favorite monks to preach and are responsible for preparing

an appropriate donatory honorarium at the end of his chapter. These will be carried on decorated offering trays in procession through the forest gate and down the labyrinthine pathway to the assembly hall, usually to the accompaniment of drum, horn, and cymbal. The lay sponsors place their gifts before the monk while he chants a blessing. This sequence repeats itself until all thirteen chapters have been completed, a process beginning early in the morning and ending late at night. Because the story of Prince Vessantara prefigures the birth of Siddhattha Gotama, the Buddha, the third day of the Desana Mahajati ceremony may include the preaching of a Thai version of the legendary life of the Buddha, the *Paṭhamasambodhi*, and the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*. The latter contains the most familiar doctrinal formulae of the Theravada tradition, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

The ritual preaching of the *Vessantara Jātaka* in northern Thailand is not just a retelling of a popular story; it links the living and the dead, laity and monk, merit making and nibbanic ideals. Although doctrinally the rituals of Theravada Buddhism are appropriately interpreted in terms of the metaphysics of action (*kamma*), rebirth (*samsara*), and merit (*puñña*), they also can be interpreted as ways to access power by means of reciprocal exchange and appropriation. Furthermore, in the case of the ritual consecration of Buddha images, ceremonies marking the end of the monastic rains retreat, and in the celebration of Prince Vessantara, we encounter a curious paradox: within these three ritual contexts, the *surrender* of worldly power by Siddhattha Gotama, by Buddhist ordinands, and by Prince Vessantara becomes the basis for the *appropriation* of power by the lay ritual participants. The operational agency of Theravada rituals in Southeast Asia are best understood from these varying and sometimes seemingly contradictory perspectives.

## FESTIVALS

The traditional festival cycle of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia features two closely connected patterns, one seasonal, the other Buddhist.





Figure 1.14. Magha Puja pilgrims. Wat Phra That Doi Tung, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand.

The former reflects the rhythm of the agricultural year that moves from the rainy season and the planting of paddy rice through the cool harvest season to the hot and dry fallow season. The second pattern is fashioned around a Buddhist calendar calculated in terms of seminal events in the tradition. Of particular significance are the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha (Visakha Puja); the occasion of the Buddha's First Discourse (Asalha Puja); and Magha Puja, the gathering of 1,250 *arabant* disciples at the Veluvana Monastery where the Buddha preached the summary of his teaching. At the conclusion of the *patimokkha*, this summary is given: "The non-doing of evil / the full performance of what is wholesome / the total purification of the mind." Taken together, these three celebrations represent the Triple Gem of Theravada Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

Visakha Puja occurs in May at the beginning of the Southeast Asian rice planting season; Asalha Puja occurs in July during the wet paddy rice growing season; and Magha Puja follows the harvest in February.<sup>61</sup> The intertwining of the defining events of a religious tradition with the natural cyclical pat-



tern of a community is not unique to Southeast Asian Buddhism. A similar integration is found in Christianity, Judaism, and other religious traditions. For example, in the northern hemisphere, Christmas comes at the end of the winter solstice with the promise of a new year with longer and brighter days, and Easter celebrates the renewal of spring.

### The New Year Festival

In the Buddhist Era lunar calendar of Theravada Southeast Asia, the end of the hot, dry season and the onset of the monsoon rains mark the beginning of a new year. It is celebrated during the month of April (in Myanmar, the month of Tagu) for a period of three to four days. In Thailand the New Year festival is named as Songkran (Sanskrit, *sankranta*), signaling the change of seasons, or in astrological terms, when the sun leaves the zodiacal sign of Pisces and enters the sign of Aries. The celebration was thought to have been adapted from South Indian Brahmanism to Buddhism in Sri Lanka and brought from there to mainland Southeast Asia by Buddhist monks.

It is to be expected that all New Year festivals focus on the transition from the old year to the new. Certain aspects of the celebration are based in the home. They include a special house cleaning and the purification of furnishings and clothing. Traditionally the New Year is a time to settle debts and seek forgiveness, especially from respected elders in the family and community. Water-cleansing rites and ceremonies occupy the center stage of New Year festivals, which include various activities ranging from the lustrating of Buddha images, Buddha relics, and a Bodhi tree at monasteries, to paying respects to elders with a water blessing, to unrestrained water soaking with buckets and water hoses. A late nineteenth-century observer in Mandalay provides the following description: "There is water everywhere . . . Some zealous people go down to the river or creek, wade into the water knee-deep, and splash water at one another till they are tired . . . No one escapes . . . A clerk comes up to his master, [pays respects] to him, and gravely pours the



*Figure 1.15. Celebrating Thai New Year. Lustrating Buddha images and relics. Wat Chetuphon, Chiang Mai, Thailand.*

contents of a silver cup down the back of his neck, saying *ye-kadaw mi*, ‘I will do homage to you with water.’<sup>62</sup>

Melford Spiro suggests that water throwing during the Burmese New Year provides a socially approved mechanism to flaunt moral conventions and social distinctions: “An integral part of the frivolity is the . . . insulting remarks leveled by the water-throwers . . . at public figures: politicians, officials, businessmen, and so on. Both sexes seize this opportunity to douse each other, and the physical and verbal encounters that accompany the dousing border . . . on the obscene. In general, the clowning, the disrespect for authority, the aggression, the transvestitism, the sexual banter . . . mark the urban celebration of the Water Festival.”<sup>63</sup> In the 1950s, even Laotian provincial governors were occasionally pitched into the Mekong River as part of the New Year festival.

A folk legend of the Tai Lue of Yunnan, China, offers an engaging etiology of the New Year custom of throwing or sprinkling water.<sup>64</sup> Once upon a time,

so goes the tale, the region of Balanaxi in Yunnan Province was plagued by a ferocious devil with an enormous mouth and tongue who set fires whenever he breathed. He captured seven beautiful girls from the village and made them his wives. Yidanhan, the youngest, cleverest, and most beautiful devised a plot to avenge the catastrophes caused by the devil. After preparing a sumptuous feast for him with an abundance of whiskey, she praised the now inebriated devil, "You are really great, my master . . . You can be the conqueror of the world."<sup>65</sup> Drunk and flattered, the devil confided to Yidanhan that, in fact, he had a fatal weakness; if someone took a hair from his head and tightened it around his neck, his head would fall off and he would die. After the devil fell fast asleep, Yidanhan pulled out a hair from his head and wound it around his neck until the devil's head fell to the ground like a huge pumpkin. Unfortunately, wherever the head rolled it set everything ablaze, burning houses and crops, and killing cattle and people. Undaunted, Yidanhan grabbed the huge head while the six other women sprinkled her and the devil's head with water brought from the river. The fire was extinguished and, thereafter, the people led happy and peaceful lives: "To commemorate the seven girls who eliminated the terrible scourge from the region, the Dai people celebrate the Water-Sprinkling Festival every New Year . . . They sprinkle water over one another, hoping thus to get rid of the sufferings and calamities of the past and to ensure favourable weather, abundant harvests and good health in the coming year."<sup>66</sup>

New Year's celebrations in Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia are culturally syncretic. In Myanmar the New Year marks the descent to earth of the Brahmanical god, Indra (the Buddhist, Sakka; Burmese, Thagya Min). He takes up residence during the last two days of the old year where he records the names of the doers of good and evil deeds. On the third day he returns to his abode in Tavatimsa Heaven. Similarly, in other Theravada countries the mythology surrounding the New Year is also Brahmanical. The first two days of the celebration have little to do with normative Buddhist teachings. Water blessings, settling debts, paying respects to elders, and so on represent the variety of ways in which the demerits or wrongdoings of the past year are erased.

The monastery becomes the focus of New Year activities on the third and fourth days of the celebration. In Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia lay devotees bring special food offerings to the monks early in the morning of the third day, which is the first day of the New Year. Laity observe the precepts, listen to sermons, lustrate Buddha images, and perform other meritorious acts that might include the freeing of birds and fish sold at the entrance to the monastery for that purpose. Because of the day's auspicious character, ordinations and house dedications also may be held. In northern Thailand men and women, young and old devote part of the day to building a "sand mountain" (*cetiya*) in the monastery compound.<sup>67</sup>

The sand mountain serves both practical and symbolic purposes. In practical terms, the sand is used to replenish and clean the monastery compound. Symbolically, the mountain represents new beginnings, reconnecting the sacred with the mundane levels of existence. Northern Thai legend offers the following Buddhist interpretation of the origin of the sand mountain. In a previous existence the Buddha was a poor man who made his living gathering firewood. Even though he was poor, he was very virtuous. One day while walking in the forest in search of dead tree limbs for firewood, he came across a place covered with clean sand. There he built a sand mountain, put a small flag made from a torn piece of cloth on top of it, and then prayed that he might be reborn a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings.<sup>68</sup>

The climax of the New Year festival in Chiang Mai is the procession of the Phra Singha Buddha image through the city streets. According to the legendary account, the image was made seven hundred years after the death of the Buddha in Sri Lanka by a *naga* king who had seen the Buddha when the Blessed One had visited the island.<sup>69</sup> Due to the serpent's watery origin, devout Buddhists ascribe rain-making powers to the image. In an act of sympathetic magic, the Phra Singha Buddha image is removed temporarily from the temple and processed around the city to herald the onset of the monsoon rains. In the weeks following this event, offerings are also made to the god Indra whose power is enshrined in the city pillar (Thai, *Indakhin*) located on the compound of the historically significant monastery, Wat Chedi Luang. Later a buffalo is sacrificed to the autochthonous guardian spirits of Chiang

Mai at the base of Doi Kham Mountain near the city. Although Buddhist celebrations associated with the beginning of the New Year take precedence over subsequent Brahmanical and animistic rites honoring the founding of the city and guaranteeing its continued protection, all serve the purpose of promoting the well-being of the community.

### Buddha's Day (Visakha Puja)

Within the yearly rhythm of Theravada Buddhism as a historical tradition, Visakha Puja is the most sacred of all anniversary occasions. The day itself is miraculous, for according to tradition, on the full-moon day of the month of Visakha (April–May) in separate years the Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, and died. Visakha Puja, therefore, celebrates the entire lifespan of the Buddha from its beginning to its end. Although in countries like Thailand this triple anniversary was once celebrated over three days, at the present time only one day is set aside as a national holiday.

The manner of its observance varies among different Theravada cultures. In Sri Lanka night processions with Vesak lanterns mark the occasion. In Thailand and Myanmar evening activities also predominate. Instead of festive processions, however, crowds of people holding lighted candles and glowing incense gather in monastery compounds to circumambulate three times around the sacred precincts and place elaborate flower arrangements in the shape of lotus buds before the Buddha altar. The faithful then enter the assembly hall to hear a discourse on the life of the Buddha, which may continue through the night. In Thailand one of the scriptures that might be preached on this night is the *Pathamasambodhi* (The Buddha's First Enlightenment). This text expands the details of the Buddha's life story highlighted by the three events that Visakha Puja incorporates. Because the sights and sounds of the festival itself may divert us from the doctrinal significance of this event, we enter the assembly hall for an all-night reading of the story of Prince Siddhattha's life from his birth and enlightenment to

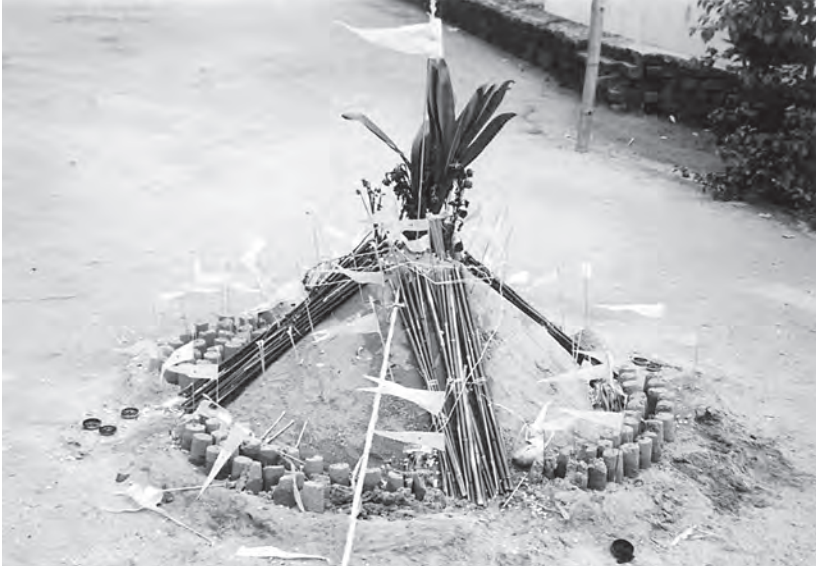


Figure 1.16 Sand cetiya (Thai, chedi). Wat Bo Kut, Keng Tung, Shan State, Myanmar.

his death and the distribution of his relics, a story in which myth, legend, and history intermingle. An outline of the story is as follows:

1. The wedding of Suddhodana and Mahamaya, the Buddha's parents
2. The Buddha in Tusita Heaven, beseeched by the gods to help humankind, enters the womb of Mahamaya
3. The birth of the Buddha and the miraculous same-day appearance of his future wife, Yasodhara; his beloved disciple, Ananda; his horse, Kanthaka; his charioteer, Channa; and the Bodhi tree
4. Two predictions by Brahmans, one that he will become either a world ruler or a Buddha, and second that he is destined to become fully enlightened because he possesses the thirty-two marks of the great man (*mahapurisa*)
5. The Buddha is given the name, Siddhattha; his mother dies after seven days; Siddhattha marries Yasodhara at age sixteen

6. The four sights he encounters—an aged person, a sick person, a corpse, and a mendicant—prompt the future Buddha to follow the mendicant path
7. Siddhattha follows an ascetic way for six years, in which he abstains from food, restrains his breath, then adopts a middle path as more appropriate to mind development; his five followers desert him
8. Sujata makes a food offering to the Buddha, mistaking him for a tree spirit; the offering bowl miraculously floats upstream as a sign he will become enlightened; the Buddha determines not to move from his seat under the Bodhi tree until he realizes his highest goal
9. The tempter, Mara, and his forces attack the Buddha; the Buddha successfully repels their attack by calling the Goddess of Earth (Thai, Nang Thorani) to witness on his behalf; the Goddess of Earth drowns the forces of Mara by wringing the water from her hair that collected there every time the Buddha performed an act of virtuous generosity (*dana*)
10. The attainments that occur immediately prior to the Buddha's enlightenment: the eight trance states; knowledge of his previous births; clairvoyance (seeing all beings as they are reborn in accordance with their kamma); perceiving the cycle of interdependent co-arising (*paticca-samuppada*); the Buddha's enlightenment
11. The Buddha spends seven days each at seven places after his enlightenment, including the Bodhi tree; the location where he reviews the *Abhidhamma*; the place where Mucalinda, the serpent king, protects him from the rain; the site where Indra and the Buddha's first two lay followers make offerings to him
12. The Buddha worries whether or not people will be able to comprehend his teaching; the gods of *brahmaloka* perceive his concern and send messengers to assure him that there are persons capable of grasping his message
13. The Buddha teaches the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (Turning the Wheel of the Law)
14. The Buddha's first five disciples to whom his first teaching was given become saints (*arahants*); more people become disciples





Figure 1.17. *The Buddha's parinibbana. Wat That Chom Doi, Keng Tung, Shan State, Myanmar.*

15. The Buddha's activities in Uruvela where he converts one thousand fire-worshipping ascetics; the Buddha impresses King Bimbisara of Rajagaha
16. Sariputta and Moggallana become followers of the Buddha
17. Siddhodana asks the Buddha to come to Kapilavatthu; his relatives become the Buddha's disciples
18. Yasodhara's sorrow over her husband's rejection of the princely role
19. Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin, attempts to kill the Buddha and then create dissension in the sangha; he is punished by the earth swallowing him up
20. The Buddha predicts the coming of the future Buddha, Metteyya, and tells Ananda that the monk with the lowest seniority will be reborn as Metteyya
21. The Buddha visits his ill father who becomes an *arahant* before his death; an order of nuns is established on Ananda's request but with a lower status than the bhikkhu sangha



22. The Buddha performs several miracles, but forbids his disciples to do so without first seeking his permission
23. The Buddha travels to Tavatimsa Heaven and preaches the *Abhidhamma* to his mother
24. The Buddha descends from Tavatimsa Heaven on a crystal ladder provided by Indra; the Buddha ascends to the top of Mount Sineru (Meru) where he performs a miracle witnessed by everyone from the hells (*petaloka*) to the heavens (*brahmaloka*)
25. The death of Sariputta and Moggallana
26. The Buddha dies (*parinibbana*)
27. The Buddha's funeral; the collecting of the Buddha's relics; the rulers of the major petty kingdoms of northern India come to request his relics
28. Mahakassapa buries the remainder of the relics which are not unearthed until the time of King Asoka who divides them among various cities in India
29. Reasons are given for the decline of Buddhism in India.<sup>70</sup>

In northern Thailand the celebration of Visakha Puja may coincide with the annual anniversary of the founding of a major temple. When this occurs, the length and extent of the festivities will be significantly increased. I witnessed one such occasion that included traditional northern Thai long drum and hot air balloon competitions as well as numerous temple processions and a lustration of the monastery's Buddha relics.<sup>71</sup> Such festivals blend together the normative events of Theravada Buddhism (the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha) with non-Buddhist, culturally relative customs. These festivals, then, celebrate both a particular Buddhist community within a given cultural and social context, and also that community's identity as part of a universal tradition stretching over twenty-five hundred years.

This study of Visakha Puja, the Buddha image consecration ritual, and the *kathina* ceremony can be regarded as complementary. The transactional nature of the *kathina* as a merit-making ritual depends for its meaning on an understanding of the Buddha as a person of special power, a power embodied in the image. Visakha Puja is a good example of the significance of the Buddha's life story as a historical paradigm from which the Buddhist tradition takes its

definition. The Buddha story is a constant referent for the tradition. Neither the Buddha's teaching nor his power can be abstracted from his person or his story. For Theravada Buddhism, his person is revealed in the episodic history of a text like the *Paṭhamasambodhi* rather than in philosophical claims about the Buddha's absolute and universal nature.

### Festival of the Floating Boats: *Loi Krathong*

Religious festivals serve many functions, some more central than others to the dominant religious tradition within a given culture. Whereas Visakha Puja provides an example of a celebration close to the core of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia, the Festival of Lights, or the Festival of the Floating Boats (Thai, *loi krathong*), has little to do with Buddhism as a doctrinal system.<sup>72</sup> Although the Festival of Lights appears to be animistic or Brahmanical in origin, it has become at least partially assimilated into the Theravada Buddhist cultural traditions of countries in Southeast Asia.

Loi Krathong is celebrated on the full-moon day of November following the end of the monastic rains retreat in October. In many parts of Thailand the celebration traditionally coincides with a specifically Buddhist ceremony, the preaching of the *Vessantara Jātaka*, the Buddha's last existence before his rebirth as Siddhattha Gotama. By this time the rainy season has come to an end, the rice crop has been planted, and the temperature has turned pleasantly cool in the evenings. The farmers have more than a month before the rice is harvested. During this season of maturing crops and moderate climate, people traditionally have the leisure to enjoy themselves at the Festival of the Floating Boats.

The celebration is a very simple one with no apparent overt connection to either Buddhist or Brahmanical rituals. Small boats (*krathong*) are made either from natural materials like banana stalks, or in recent years, from polystyrene foam and crepe paper, and floated on rivers or ponds. Lighted candles, incense, and coins of small denominations are placed on the boats. Everyone participates, elders watching the bobbing lights on the water and

the children often swimming out to retrieve the most beautiful *krathongs* or the coins that might be found on them. On the riverbank, families eat a picnic supper, and young and old alike enjoy firework displays. In northern Thailand, houses may be decorated, and in the city of Chiang Mai the Loi Krathong festival has become a commercialized tourist attraction that includes a parade of large floats through the city streets.

The historical roots and meaning of Loi Krathong are ambiguous. It may derive from Dipavali, the Indian festival of lights, or from the traditional Chinese custom of floating lotus flower lamps to guide the spirits of people drowned in rivers and lakes. The earliest evidence of the celebration in Thailand comes from the Sukhothai period when the second queen of King Phra Rueang (ca. 1300 C.E.), the daughter of a Brahman family attached to the court, began the custom to please the king. This explanation suggests an Indian Brahmanical origin. Two Buddhist explanations of a mythological nature have been advanced: that the *krathongs* carry offerings to the Buddha's footprint that he left on the sandy shore of the Nammada River in the Deccan Plain in India by a *naga* king who wished to worship the Lord Buddha after his death;<sup>73</sup> or, that the river festival is an expression of gratitude to Phra Upagutta, who in the guise of a *naga*, foiled Mara's attempt to destroy the 84,000 *cetiyas* built by King Asoka.<sup>74</sup> Although these two etiologies differ, both are expressions of popular piety or devotionism that characterizes much of lay Theravada Buddhist practice in Southeast Asia.

In northern Thailand a historical explanation for the origin of Loi Krathong prevails. During the reign of King Kamala of Haripuñjaya (modern day Lamphun) in the tenth century C.E., a deadly cholera epidemic forced the populace to evacuate the city. Eventually they made their way to present day Pegu in Myanmar, where they stayed for six years until the epidemic subsided. After the majority of the people returned to Haripuñjaya, they sent gifts of food and clothing down the river to their relatives who remained in Pegu.<sup>75</sup> The festival of Loi Krathong celebrates this event with an annual offering to the spirits of departed ancestors. Others believe the *krathongs* to be offerings to the goddess of the *Mae Khongkha* (Ganges River), the Mother of Waters.<sup>76</sup>

Whatever the historical explanation of the festival of Loi Krathong, it remains one of the most picturesque celebrations in Thailand, despite its tenuous connections with doctrinal Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Buddhist rationalizations have been provided for it, and where Buddhist temples are located near rivers, people take their *krathongs* into the temple compound to be blessed or to circumambulate the sacred precincts before placing them in the water; however, Loi Krathong represents a festival that defies identification as “Buddhist.” Perhaps for this reason both now and in the past, some Thai Buddhist monasteries choose this night to preach the popular, *Vessantara Jātaka*, thereby appending to this celebratory occasion a Buddhist meaning.

## rites of passage

Buddhism in Southeast Asia has not only integrated into its own sacred history a culture’s seasonal, agricultural rhythm, but also has marked and celebrated important junctures in the life cycle of individuals in the community. These life passage rituals integrate various cultural elements. Traditionally, birth rites have had little or no connection with Theravada Buddhism, but adolescent, early adulthood, old age, and death rites have been assimilated into a Buddhist scheme of life passage or transition rituals.<sup>77</sup> Male adolescent or puberty initiatory rites take the form of temporary ordination into the monastic order. In Myanmar, ear-piercing rituals are held for girls at the same time as male ordinations. Marriage constitutes a major young adult passage rite in which Buddhist monks may play a minor role, primarily to chant *suttas* for the protection and well-being of the couple or to preach a sermon and act as recipients of merit-making gifts. Buddhism has been especially associated with death rites or funeral observances throughout greater Asia.

Life passage rites are open to several interpretations: to ensure a safe transition from one stage of life to another; to integrate the life cycle of the individual into the ongoing life pattern of the community; to place the individual within a cosmological structure governed by various unseen but

relatively unpredictable powers such as kamma, gods, or protective spirits; or to relate the life of the individual and the community to the ethical and spiritual teachings of Buddhism. The remainder of this section will examine the rituals associated with four life passage periods: adolescence, young adulthood, aging, and death. We shall focus on the first and the last of these two rites, novitiate ordination and the funeral ceremony. Regarding the latter, S. J. Tambiah observes, “In no other rites of passage . . . is Buddhism so directly concerned with a human event.”<sup>78</sup>

### Joining the Sangha

Ordination into the Theravada Buddhist sangha can be interpreted on a variety of levels. From a doctrinal perspective, monks are religious virtuosos, that is, in seeking ordination, monks commit themselves to a lifelong pursuit of nibbana, Buddhism’s highest goal, within the context of the monastic order. The Pali words, bhikkhu/bhikkhuni,<sup>79</sup> refer to one who gives up ordinary pursuits of livelihood for a higher goal—to become a mendicant or almsperson. Alms seeking “is not just a means of subsistence, but an outward token that . . . [they] have renounced the world and all its goods and have thrown . . . [themselves] for bare living on the chances of public charity.”<sup>80</sup> The *Dhammapada*, the best known of all Theravada texts, characterizes the doctrinal ideal of the monk as follows:

. . . the true monk is one whose senses are restrained and who is controlled in body and speech; he is contented with what he receives, is not envious of others and has no thought of himself. Such selflessness is rooted in the Buddha’s truth (*dhamma*), and the monk who dwells in and meditates on the *dhamma* is firmly established in the Truth (*saddhamma*). Such a being is suffused with loving kindness (*metta*), possesses the cardinal virtues, is refined in conduct, and is filled with a transcendental joy. Confident in the Buddha’s teachings, having attained peace and supreme bliss, the monk ‘illuminates this world like the moon from a cloud.’<sup>81</sup>

Ideal monks are those who seek and attain the truth exemplified in the person of the Buddha. Having reached this goal they become morally and spiritually transformed, irradiating the Buddha's dhamma for the benefit of humankind.

In all Theravada countries, meditation monasteries maintain an environment of peaceful tranquility where men and women pursue the Buddhist ideal of nibbana: overcoming suffering, achieving equanimity, and developing insight into the true nature of reality. Although some enter the monastery to seek nibbana, most fall short of this lofty goal. Melford Spiro analyzed the reasons given by Burmese men for entering the monkhood into three conscious motives—to achieve a religious goal, a desire to escape the difficulties and miseries of human life, and the wish to obtain an easier way of life; and three unconscious motives—dependency, narcissism, and emotional timidity.<sup>82</sup> Other, somewhat more socially descriptive reasons for entering the monastery include acquiring an education, achieving a higher social status, responding to social custom and pressure, and repaying a filial debt, especially to one's mother.

In Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia monastic tenure varies greatly in length, depending upon the ordinand's motivation. Unlike the norm in Western Christianity, becoming a monk does not necessarily involve a lifetime commitment, although many noted meditation teachers and scholar-monks spend most or all of their adult life in robes.

In Thailand one of the principal reasons for being ordained is to acquire an education.<sup>83</sup> This practice still pertains among the rural poor where children often cannot afford to attend government schools. Ordination as a novice provides for their material needs and gives them a basic education. Indeed, if a boy is bright and highly motivated, he may complete secondary school as a novice or a monk, graduate from a monastic college, and then earn an advanced degree from a university in Thailand or another country, such as India. After teaching in a monastery school for several years or serving as an administrator in a larger provincial monastery, the majority of monks will disrobe and take a responsible and respected secular job. Although such

exploitation of the monastic educational structure siphons off able sangha leadership, it is an accepted practice that bears little or no social stigma.

Undoubtedly this pattern of being educated in monastic schools only to leave the order reflects an earlier practice whereby a young man would be ordained as a novice near the age of puberty, remain in the monastery for one or more years, and then return to lay society.<sup>84</sup> During this period he would receive a rudimentary education, learn the fundamentals of Buddhism, and prepare for a responsible life as a lay Buddhist supporter of the monastic order. This particular practice, still followed in some parts of Southeast Asia, resembles a rite of passage for males into adulthood. In this sense, the Western parallel to ordination as a Buddhist novice, customarily between the ages of twelve and nineteen, is the rite of confirmation in the Christian tradition and bar/bat mitzvah in Jewish practice. Traditionally, these ceremonies symbolize full participation in their respective religious-social communities, just as having been ordained a Buddhist monk is considered an essential stage in the passage to mature male adulthood in Thai, Lao, Burmese, or Cambodian society and culture.

The monk takes a vow of celibacy and is expected to minimize material attachments, however, monastic tenure ordinarily does not involve excessive ascetical practices. Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia consistently upholds the time-honored tradition of the Middle Way. In actual practice, a monk lives a reasonably comfortable life and occupies a respected status in the community. For children of poorer families, in particular, becoming a monk represents a definite improvement in social or economic status. For this reason it is not surprising to learn that the majority of Theravada monks in Southeast Asia do, in fact, come from modest backgrounds. For instance, at the two monastic colleges in Bangkok, a high percentage of the students come from northeastern Thailand, which is one of the most economically disadvantaged regions of the country.

Finally, it should be noted that ordination is perceived as a singular way of repaying a debt to one's parents, especially one's mother.<sup>85</sup> That one has come into the world, survived infancy, and become a youth is primarily the result of a mother's care. Within the calculus of meritorious action, by being



Figure 1.18. Novitiate ordination. Young boy dressed as Prince Siddhattha. Wat Yang Khuang, Keng Tung, Shan State, Myanmar.

ordained the ordinand gains a spiritual benefit for his parents. The mutual reciprocity characterizing merit-making rituals informs the meaning of ordination into the monastic order: by joining the monastic order, if even for only a short period of time, a young man returns to his mother and father a spiritual boon.

A village ordination in northern Thailand customarily will be held for one or two days. The first part is an animistic ceremony called “propitiating the spirits” or “calling the spirits” (Thai, *riak khwan*), and the second part is ordination into the novitiate (*pabbajja*), or if the candidate is twenty years old or more, higher ordination (*upasampada*). The first part of the ceremony may be held in the ordinand’s home and will be the occasion for village-wide festivities with as much feasting, drinking, and general merrymaking as the young man’s family can afford. The spirit-calling ceremony will be led by a



layman, who performs a similar role at weddings, house dedications, and other auspicious or life transition occasions. His earlier life as an ordained monk has prepared him for learning the protocols for these rituals as well as the methods of chanting and preaching. His ritual role differs from that of the monk but rivals it in importance. He often functions as a ritual mediator between the sangha and the laity.<sup>86</sup>

During the ceremony the lay leader performs a ritual in which he invokes the ordinand's thirty-two spirits (Thai, *khwan*) and calls them away from all previous attachments to the pleasures of lay life so that the youth will not be swayed or divided in his pursuit of the monastic life, especially the trials of celibacy. To attract the *khwan*, a special offering bowl is prepared. It may be a relatively simple food offering in a lacquer bowl or a much more elaborate symbolic reconstruction of a cosmic tree symbolizing an axial connection between the human and spirit realms. At the conclusion of the ritual, a sacred thread is then tied around the wrists of the ordinand, representing the tying of the spirits into his body after they have been invoked.

Before the spirit-calling ritual begins, the ordinand will be properly prepared for his ordination. His monastic instructor will shave his head and clothe him in a white robe. These acts symbolize the liminality of this life passage ritual, the transition from householder to monk, and the negation of one's previous identity prior to beginning a new life with a monastic name.<sup>87</sup> They also represent the monk's disregard for the things of this world, including the vanities of personal appearance. At the conclusion of the spirit-calling ritual, the ordinand, his family, friends, and other well-wishers process to the monastery compound. In some instances, the young man will be dressed as Prince Siddhattha and ride a horse to the monastery in a reenactment of the great renunciation of the Lord Buddha. The procession circles the ordination hall three times. Before entering, the ordinand bows before the *sima* or boundary stones at the front entrance, asking the Buddha to forgive his sins and to grant him blessings. The sacrality of the ordination hall and, hence, the significance of the ordination ceremony, is indicated by the nine boundary stones buried in the ground marking the hall's center and the eight directional points around its perimeter.

Upon entering the hall, one of the ordinand's friends may play the role of the tempter, Mara, pretending to prevent the ordinand's entrance, or the ordinand may fling a last handful of coins to those who have followed him. He approaches the chapter of ten monks seated on the floor in a semicircle in front of a large Buddha image resting on a raised altar at the far end of the ordination hall. Bowing to the floor three times before his preceptor (*upajjhaya*), a senior monk who will conduct the ordination ceremony, the ordinand presents to him gifts of candles, incense, and robes. Professing the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha to be his refuge, he requests permission three times to enter "the priesthood in the Vinaya-Dhamma of the Blessed One."<sup>88</sup> The preceptor receives the robes, instructs the ordinand in the Three Gems, and offers a meditation on the impermanence of the five aggregates of bodily existence. At this point another monk designated as the young man's instructor (*acariya*), formally instructs him in the ten precepts upheld by all monastic novices to refrain from: taking life, stealing, sexual intercourse, lying, intoxicants, eating at forbidden times, entertainments, bodily adornment, sleeping on a comfortable bed, and receiving money. Having taken the precepts, once again the ordinand approaches the preceptor and is given a Pali name. The instructor hangs a begging bowl over his left shoulder, has the young man identify his bowl and three monastic robes, and then questions him on behalf of the entire chapter. His formal queries include: "Do you have leprosy?" "Are you a human?" "Are you free of debt?" "Do you have permission from your parents?" Finding him free of impediments, the instructor then presents the ordinand to the sangha, requesting that they admit him into the monastic order. Acknowledging their consent by a collective silence, the assembled monks receive the young man into the order as a novice. The ceremony concludes with the preceptor instructing him in a monk's duties and responsibilities.<sup>89</sup>

Among the Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhist countries, only Myanmar affords a parallel adolescent life passage ritual for women. A *shinbyu* ceremony includes not only young boys being ordained into the monastic novitiate for a temporary period, but adolescent girls as well. An all-day *shinbyu* I witnessed in Mandalay in 1990 included a morning devoted to entertainment. Men, women, and children crowd into a pavilion constructed to resemble a palace.



Figure 1.19. Shinbyu ceremony. Mandalay, Myanmar.

Over a dozen boys and girls dressed in costumes of princes and princesses sit on a central stage watching several storytellers and mimes entertain the audience. At the conclusion of the entertainment, the girls' ears are pierced or "bored" and the boys' heads are shaved. Pierced ears symbolize entrance into adult female roles. The young boys take the vows of a novice monk, preparing them to assume adult male roles in society.

Is it possible for women in Theravada Buddhist cultures to enter the monastic order and pursue the same spiritual quest as men? The answer is complex one.<sup>90</sup> We know from the *Therīgathā* (Poems of the Nuns) that from a doctrinal perspective, it is possible for both women and men to attain the goal of nibbana. Historically, however, the rules of discipline make clear that the order of female monks is subordinate to that of men. Furthermore, the order of nuns (bhikkhuni) endured in India only until ca. 456 C.E., and it is uncertain whether or not the order ever reached mainland Southeast Asia.<sup>91</sup> Today, orders of renunciant women flourish in Southeast Asia, although technically they are not bhikkhuni.<sup>92</sup> In comparison to Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, women renunciants in Myanmar enjoy a higher social and spiritual status. Referred to in Burmese as *thilashin* ("one who bears

the burden of *sila* or virtue”), they manage their own monasteries, pursue higher Buddhist studies, and take the national Pali exams. Like their male counterparts, the *thilashin* may collect morning alms donations and may also undergo temporary novitiate ordination similar to monks. These two practices demonstrate that in Myanmar, female as well as male renunciants are perceived to represent a religious field of merit. That *thilashin* enjoy a relatively high social and spiritual status is reflected in the participation of girls in the Burmese *shinbyu*. Women in Myanmar are able to participate in more religious-cultural institutions and practices from which their female counterparts are excluded in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.

The ordination ceremony provides an extraordinary opportunity to understand the multifaceted nature of Theravada Buddhism as a cultural institution in its Southeast Asian context. Doctrinally, it represents the highest ideals of the tradition; symbolically, it offers a reenactment of the most dramatic event of the Buddha’s life narrative; structurally, it illustrates the threshold transition fundamental to the meaning of rites of passage; anthropologically, it provides evidence for the syncretic nature of Southeast Asian Buddhism even in its most basic practices.

### Weddings and Life-Extension Ceremonies

Whereas adolescent life passage rituals mark a youth’s entrance into adulthood, marriage signals the beginning of a new adult stage of life, one in which young men and women assume responsibility for a family and broader social obligations within their community. In all cultures weddings mark a crucial transitional stage in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. A decline in culturally sanctioned wedding rituals raises questions not only about the waning role of religion in defining cultural identity, but it also suggests profound changes in the way individuals perceive themselves in relationship to communities. One of the challenges of our own day is the creation of rites of passage symbolizing the assumption of adult responsi-



Figure 1.20. *The riak khwan portion of a wedding ceremony, calling the spirits of the bride and groom. Lamphun, Thailand.*

bilities for the maintenance of communities' current social realities that may differ considerably from the customs of the past.

From a doctrinal perspective, the Buddhist sangha has little to do with weddings and life-extension rites, the latter being a ritual marking the sixtieth birthday or end of the fifth astrological cycle (one cycle equals twelve years). Shway Yoe [Sir James George Scott] observed in regard to nineteenth-century Burmese wedding customs: "The ritual is very simple and has nothing whatever of a religious character about it; in fact the celibate *pongyis* [monks] would be grossly scandalised if they were asked to take any part in it."<sup>93</sup> Scott's observation fails to take into account the animistic religious dimensions of marriage rites and the fact that today Theravada monks may be invited to participate in wedding ceremonies. From a historical perspective, one can justifiably argue that the presence of monks at a marriage rite reflects the influence of Western Christian custom,<sup>94</sup> however, the Theravada tradition legitimates such a practice on its own terms. The following descriptions of a

wedding and an “entering old age” rite rely on my observations of ceremonies in Lamphun Province, northern Thailand, in the 1970s and 1980s.

As a religious ritual, a traditional Thai wedding reflects both animistic and Brahmanical influences. Traditionally, village weddings are usually held in the home of the bride. The day is one of celebration and feasting, often straining the financial means of the couple’s families. The main ritual officiant is a layman or “spirit doctor” (Thai, *mo riak khwan*), or one who calls the spirits.

The wedding is usually held in the morning, especially if monks are invited to participate. The day begins in the early hours with the preparation of the wedding feast. Gradually relatives, friends and guests arrive, filling the central room of the house. About 10 A.M. a group of five, seven, or nine monks arrive and take their place along the outside wall next to a carved, gilded altar on which a single, crystal Buddha image has been enshrined. A white cord extends from the image to a silver bowl into which are placed offerings for the spirits of the bride and groom: two eggs, two balls of sticky rice, two bananas, and two small glasses of rice wine. The lay officiant leads those assembled in paying respects to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha and taking the five precepts. He then requests the monks to chant the *paritta*. For a wedding, monks often chant the *Maṅgala Sutta* and the *Mettā Sutta*, two of the most widely used *paritta*. The following selection from the *Maṅgala Sutta* illustrates its appropriateness for such an occasion in a traditional Buddhist culture. In the text some of the responses to the question of what constitutes the highest “blessings” or *mangala* are:

Not to associate with the foolish, but to associate with the wise.

To reside in a suitable locality . . . and to set oneself in the right direction.

Vast learning, skill in handicraft, well-grounded in discipline, pleasant speech.

To support one’s father and mother, to cherish one’s wife and children, and  
to be engaged in peaceful occupations.

Liberality, righteous conduct, rendering assistance to relatives.

To cease and abstain from evil, to abstain from intoxicating drinks, being  
diligent in performing righteous acts.





*Figure 1.21. Sixtieth-birthday life-extension ritual (suep chata). Lamphun, Thailand.*

Reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude, and the timely hearing of the teaching of the Buddha.

Patience, obedience, meeting with holy monks for discussions.

Self-control, chastity, comprehension of the Noble Truths, and the realization of Nibbana.<sup>95</sup>

Following the chanting of the *paritta*, the lay officiant then preaches a lengthy sermon, speaking in a colorful, charismatic style with his vocal cadence moving between high falsetto and low resonant pitches. His address incorporates many different elements: calling the spirits, a lesson in Buddhist morality, and humor. He cajoles the spirits away from previous romantic attachments, enticing them by his artful vocal skills and the offerings pre-

pared for them. At the conclusion of the sermon, the officiant takes a length of string that extends from the Buddha altar to the offering bowl and ties it around the wrists of the bride and the groom. Relatives and honored guests follow suit. Whereas we might interpret this act as an unusual cultural expression of “tying the knot,” within the animistic context of his northern Thai ritual it represents implanting the spiritual elements of the wedded couple into their bodies. That is, calling the spirits signifies the union of the bride and groom on both spiritual and physical planes. The participation of relatives and friends in this act of “tying the spirits” emphasizes the communal significance of marriage.

The ceremony ends with the presentation of food offerings and other appropriate gifts to the monks who then depart. In the case of a wedding, the meritorious transaction represented by these offerings supplement and thereby reinforce the spirit-calling rite as a means to ensure the success and well-being of the new family. With the formal portion of the ceremony completed, the wedding festivities begin. After an elaborate lunch, guests spend the remainder of the afternoon meeting old friends who returned for the wedding, gossiping, and wandering in and out of the compound of the bride’s parents’ house where the ceremony took place. Evening festivities might include another elaborate meal, music played by a local northern Thai orchestra, and general merrymaking. Around nine o’clock at night the couple, led by grandparents, aunts, and uncles, is taken to the bedroom where they will spend the night. Along their path from the outside of the house up the stairs to the bedroom, young boys and girls attempt to obstruct their progress. Only by distributing gifts of small coins and sweets are the bride and groom allowed to proceed on their way. Because the festivities may continue for several hours, the newly married couple has little or none of the romantic privacy one normally associates with a honeymoon.

Like a wedding ceremony, a sixtieth-birthday life-extension ritual incorporates both Buddhist and animistic elements to ensure blessings in this life, and in this instance, a long and healthy old age. In the northern Thai cultural context, the ritual marking old age is called a life-extension or life-enhancement (Thai, *suep chata*) ritual.<sup>96</sup> *Suep chata* rites may be held for an



individual, a family, or a community with the general purpose of warding off evil and engendering good luck, prosperity, and a long life. In addition to being a ritual marking the end of the fifth life cycle, the *suep chata* may be performed to cure an illness, escape from bad luck predicted by a fortune teller, bless a new home, celebrate a monk's elevation in rank, or protect a village from natural disaster.

At the fifth-cycle birthday ritual the celebrant sits beneath a tripod constructed of bamboo poles and stalks of sugar cane that is placed in front of a Buddha altar. A white *sai siñcana* cord extending from a Buddha image is tied to the bamboo tripod and wrapped three times around the head of the celebrant. A candle the height of the celebrant stands to one side of the altar. At the base of each pole of the tripod are placed coconuts, bananas, clay pots filled with water, and trays heaped with various food offerings each numbering 108. These include sticky rice, betel nuts, and husked and unhusked rice. Behind the celebrant stands a wishing tree made out of a bamboo stalk adorned with sixty small flags.

Together these objects create a sacred space, an axial center of power uniting the celebrant with various levels of divine and cosmic powers. The sacred number of 108 symbolizes the sum of the power valencies of the basic constituents of the cosmos—earth, water, fire, air—together with the numerical sum of the equally potent spiritual power of the Buddha, his dhamma, and the sangha.<sup>97</sup> The ceremony begins when the celebrant lights the small candles on the Buddha altar and then the large candle that corresponds to the height of the celebrant. This act not only announces the beginning of the ceremony, but also activates the divine powers in the universe. As the celebrant sits in the middle of this ritually constructed center of the world, the monks chant *paritta* or protection *suttas*, thereby empowering the celebrant with the power of the Buddha and his teachings as well as the potency of all the *devata*. After the monks have chanted for approximately an hour, they are presented food for their noon meal. The blessing they chant after their meal concludes the formal part of the ceremony. A generous luncheon for all of the guests concludes the festivities.

## Funeral Rites

Entrance into the monastic order represents a passage into a different stage of life, ideally one dedicated to the pursuit of a goal that will free the monk from the power of kamma and subsequent rebirth and the stresses and anxieties (*dukkha*) of worldly life. Marriage and old age rituals serve a different purpose. They reaffirm the place individuals occupy within the life of a community at times of major personal and social transition. Death signals another kind of passage, one fraught with ambiguity for the deceased as well as for the living. Consequently, death is marked by rites that assure the survivors of their own well-being as well as for the benefit of the departed. To modern Western eyes, a traditional funeral rite in Southeast Asia seems unusually festive. Preliminaries to a cremation include an hour of socializing among friends, making new acquaintances, and enjoying refreshments. One must keep in mind, however, that the funeral not only honors the deceased and mourns his or her loss, but also affirms the continued existence of the family, the community, and the deceased in a new life. While funerals acknowledge the fact of death, they also celebrate life.

Funerary rites in Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia may be held in the home or at the temple and will vary in many details depending on the type and circumstances of death (from old age or accident), the status of the deceased (rich or poor, lay or monk), and the local customs of a particular area. For the funeral ceremonies honoring a Chiang Mai businessman I witnessed in 2008, traditional chanting services were held for five days at a major Chiang Mai monastery. Afterward, the casket was driven in procession to a nearby crematorium in the city where, prior to the cremation, groups of monks and novices chanted before the casket as they received sets of *pangsukun-chiwon* (Thai) robes. This custom harkens back to the tradition that the robes worn by Buddhist monks were made from cast off cloth that had shrouded corpses, symbolizing the impermanence of bodily existence. The *Abhidhamma* text that monks chant at funerals includes the teaching of the impermanence of life, a sentiment conveyed by the sonorous rhythmic style of the funeral chant. Funeral sermons, as well as eulogizing the deceased, incorporate the



Figure 1.22. Monks chanting before a funeral casket. Lamphun Province, Thailand.

themes of impermanence, reward and punishment, and the ultimate goal of nibbana that transcends life and death.

Village funeral rites traditionally incorporated many animistic elements designed to dispel the threatening powers of evil associated with death. The following account is based on my own observations at funerals in rural Thailand and information gleaned from ethnographic studies of Buddhist funerals in the Thai village context.<sup>98</sup> Near the moment of death, Buddhist mantras may be whispered into the ear of the dying, such as “*Buddho*” or the four syllables symbolizing the structure of the *Abhidhamma*—*ci*, *ce*, *ru*, and *ni* (mind, mental concepts, body, and nibbana)—or written on a piece of paper and put into the deceased’s mouth.<sup>99</sup> At death there may be an extended period of loud wailing, in part to announce to the village community that a death has occurred. After removing the deceased’s clothes, the body will be washed. This can be interpreted as cleansing the soul in preparation for its passage to heaven. The hands will be clasped together over the chest and a thread will be passed three times around the hands, toes, and neck symbolizing the bonds of passion, anger, and ignorance. Before cremation these

will be removed, representing the release from these bonds by the power of charity, kindheartedness, and meditation.<sup>100</sup>

A number of different items are placed at the head of the corpse. These may include food and water for the person's spirit to eat and drink, a lamp to light its way to the other world, and a three-tailed white flag representing the Three Gems. Flowers and incense are put in the deceased's hands. Traditionally offered before Buddha images, the flags represent the Buddha's teachings. Finally, a coin may be put in the corpse's mouth or a small set of silver and golden flags placed near the body to pay the demons for not obstructing the soul's journey to heaven.

After the body is placed into a coffin, the cremation could take place immediately or be deferred a week or more depending on such circumstances as the availability of time, return of relatives from long distances, and so on. In the case of distinguished monks, the period between death and cremation may extend up to a year. The coffin, itself, will be made from plain wood planks. The three forming the bottom are said to represent the three levels of the Buddhist cosmology: the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the formless realm. When the coffin is taken from the house, the head will be pointed to the west, the direction of death, symbolizing the reversal of life by death.<sup>101</sup> Often, temporary stairs will be set up at a different part of the house. The coffin will then be taken down these stairs, and spun around several times on the way to the pyre to disorient the spirit of the deceased. Customarily, the temporary stairs will have only three steps which represent the tripartite cosmological structure of Theravada Buddhism.<sup>102</sup> When the temporary stairs have been removed and the body cremated, it is hoped that the now freed spirit will reach the state of nibbana.

The days between the actual death and the funeral and cremation are filled with many preparations. In the case of a normal death of a moderately well-to-do villager, the family of the deceased is joined by relatives and friends to plan the evening festivities. Local orchestras entertain guests, and there will be extraordinary feasting, drinking, and even gambling. During the day monks are invited to the home for funeral chants, and gifts will be presented to them to earn merit for the deceased. Although the noisy evening activi-

ties could be interpreted as a means of discouraging the dead person's ghost, its primary function appears to be a reinforcement of community solidarity and integration in the face of death's inevitability and finality.<sup>103</sup>

On the day of the funeral, selected for its auspicious signs for the deceased, the coffin is taken in procession from the home to the temple or to the cremation grounds. The size and extent of the procession varies according to the wealth and status of the deceased. I witnessed a funeral in Chiang Mai, Thailand, of a distinguished abbot whose coffin was borne on an elaborate funeral palanquin in the form of a mythological elephant-bird in a procession in which thousands of people wound their way through the streets of the city. For this event, distinguished monks from various regions of the country were invited, and 108 young men were temporarily ordained as novices as an act of merit making.

Prior to a cremation a final preaching service will be held, the monks will chant, and a sermon will be delivered. A typical rural northern Thai sermon might include remarks such these by the abbot of the *wat* at the village of Ku Daeng near the city of Chiang Mai:

Dear friends, I was invited to deliver a speech to you who are attending this merit-making for the dead Mr. Khiow. A good Buddhist presents his guests with two things, good food and accommodations and a sermon by a priest to take back home with them. Today I will preach to you about death.

Death is a common event that will come to everyone without exception. Nobody can live forever, but everybody must die sooner or later. Some people say that a dead person is only trouble to his relatives and friends who stay behind. Dead animals are more useful to us than dead people because we can use their hide, bones, and meat. The only things left by a dead person are his good deeds, which we can remember.

We go to the funeral of a dead person just as if we were going to see off a good friend when he is leaving for another country. Now we have come to see Mr. Khiow off to another world. We do not like to see him go, but when his time came he had to leave. Nobody could stop him, all we are able to do is to make merit and transfer merit to him . . .

Everybody must remember that we all have to die, not only the person whose funeral we are attending today. Before death comes we must prepare ourselves for it. The Lord Buddha did not cry when death was approaching because he knew the meaning of death. We cry when we see death because we do not have the knowledge of a Buddha.

The Lord Buddha said, 'Death is the change of the name and the body of a spirit from one form to another.' Nothing in the world, even life or matter, can vanish; it only changes.

To the question where the spirit of a dead person goes, we can say that it is reborn. In Buddhism we say that a person with an unclean spirit of covetousness, anger, and ill temper will be reborn again, but he who has a clean spirit will go straight to Nibbana. The Lord Buddha had a clean spirit; so after his death, his spirit went straight to Nibbana without being reborn again . . .

I cannot speak any longer because I have already taken a long time. Before ending, I shall suggest again that death is not a strange event; it does not belong to any particular person, but to all of us. We will die when our time comes, the time being scheduled by . . . [Mara], who is the chief of death.

If I should receive any merit for this preaching, I beg to dedicate it to Mr. Khiow. I ask that this merit may help and support him in the right place, or give him a chance to be reborn in a good place. If his spirit should still be wandering around some place, because of his attachment to his family or his property, I beg that this merit lead him from these earthly attachments to some other place.

Finally, I beg for the blessings of the Lord Buddha to come upon you and bring you long life, a light complexion, happiness, and good health.<sup>104</sup>

The cremation itself may take several forms: the wooden coffin may be burned on a pyre of wood; the coffin and funeral car may be burned through an elaborate process of igniting rockets and firecrackers; or the coffin may be burned in a *wat* crematorium. Prior to the cremation, the monks attending the funeral approach the coffin and remove sets of robes that lay donors have placed on it to earn special merit for the deceased. As they remove the robes, the monks chant the following Pali stanza:

All conditioned things are impermanent;  
 Their nature is to arise and decay.  
 Having arisen they cease;  
 In their stilling is happiness. (*Dīgha Nikāya. Sutta 16*)

Numerous elements comprise the funeral rite in Southeast Asian cultures. Even though the rite is conducted by Buddhist monks and the theme of the impermanence of the elements that constitute human existence assumes a prominent place in chant and sermon, much of what takes place diverges considerably from doctrinal Theravada Buddhism, in particular, the not-self teaching. The spirit or soul (*viññana*) of the deceased is perceived as a powerful agent that must be treated properly in a ritual sense to ensure its future well-being and avoid retribution on the surviving family and friends. Because of this belief, despite its seeming inauspiciousness, a funeral is a significant meritmaking event for both the deceased and the living. Meritmaking and protective magic complement one another in mortuary rites; furthermore, as in other religious traditions, Buddhist funeral rituals celebrate the continuance of a social group—family, community, village—thereby mitigating the threat of death to social cohesion and solidarity.

This chapter explored several facets of Buddhism and society in Southeast Asia on the level of popular belief and practice beginning with the centrality of paradigmatic stories and exemplary lives for conveying the normative values of the tradition. Rituals, festivals, and rites of passage were studied from three varied perspectives: as examples of the syncretic nature of popular Buddhism; as contexts for merit making and the appropriation of sacred power; and as expressions of the way in which the people of Theravada South and Southeast Asian cultures ascribe meaning to their lives through the rituals marking Buddhist history, the natural cycles of an agricultural community, and the life transitions of individuals. Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia is truly complex, defying simple definitions or characterizations. Although it valorizes a nibbanically-defined master narrative pursued by monks meditating in tranquil, forested retreats, the actual narrative of Theravada Buddhism in

Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia does not follow a single story line, but unfolds as a complex and richly nuanced epic tale.



## PART II

# BUDDHISM AND THE STATE

In our study of Buddhism in Southeast Asia we now turn our attention to a different context: the classical Southeast Asian monarchy and the modern Southeast Asian nation-state. From the themes of ritual, festival, and rites of passage, the focus shifts to an examination of myth, legend, and history. We examine the influence of King Asoka as the paradigmatic Buddhist ruler; the symbiotic relationship between Southeast Asian kingship and sacred cosmology; the Buddha as cosmocrator, that is, one who establishes the order of the world and empowers it or makes it sacred. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the rise of charismatic Buddhist political leaders in the postcolonial period.

Resources will include the traditional Theravada Buddhist chronicles of Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, supplemented by archaeological evidence from the great classical sites of Angkor in Cambodia, Pagan in Burma, and Sukhothai in Thailand under the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism, plus modern historical sources, including the work of historians of religion and anthropologists.<sup>1</sup>

Although Max Weber, the acknowledged founder of the field of sociology of religion, describes early Buddhism as an otherworldly mysticism, the Pali texts of Theravada Buddhism say otherwise, revealing a close relationship between the Buddha and the reigning monarchs of his day in northern India. Such a portrayal was in the material self-interest of a growing Buddhist monastic order. It is reasonable to assume that from the beginning the Buddhist sangha was supported by the social, economic, and political elites for social, political, and also religious reasons. It is worth noting that Prince

Siddhattha came from the ruling *khattiya* class, and as the legend tells us, the prince's own father, the king of the Sakya clan, and other monarchs of his day became ardent supporters of this new religion.

In general, religious and royal institutions were mutually supportive of each other in South and Southeast Asia. Royal patronage of the Buddhist monastic order was reciprocated by institutional loyalty, and the construction of religious cosmologies and mythologies that valorized the king as propagator of the Buddha's religion (*sasana*) were regarded as essential to the peaceful harmony and well-being of the state. Heinz Bechert suggests six ways whereby religious authority legitimated political power within the Southeast Asian context: (1) identifying the present ruler with the mythological world monarch (*cakkavattin*); (2) ascribing to the ruler the moral and spiritual perfections of bodhisattva-hood; (3) describing the ideal king as the promoter and protector of Buddhism; (4) attributing to the ruler the authority of one who governs by the dhamma, i.e., the *rajadhamma*; (5) describing the ruler as a *devaraja*, an apotheosis or appearance of a divine being, such as a Hindu god or a Buddha; (6) the coexistent support of Southeast Asian monarchs by both Buddhist and non-Buddhist cults. We shall explore these forms of what Bechert refers to as "legitimization of political power by religious authority."<sup>2</sup>

## ASOKA, THE EXEMPLARY BUDDHIST RULER

Buddhist chronicles of Theravada Southeast Asia often begin their legendary histories with the Buddha's visit to the country of the chronicle's origin. Before recounting the history of Buddhism in that area and the support particular kings rendered the Buddhist monastic order, many of the chronicles outline the history of Theravada Buddhism in India and Sri Lanka. In these accounts, one monarch stands out: Asoka Maurya. He becomes the exemplar par excellence for future Buddhist monarchs, embodying the virtues of righteousness and justice, materially supporting the monastic order, and ensuring both religious and political harmony throughout the realm. In effect, the Buddhist

tradition constructs Asoka as the historical embodiment of the *cakkavattin*, the mythic Buddhist world ruler, one who embodies the dhamma and rules by it, and who personifies the ten royal virtues or *dasarajadhamma*: generosity, moral virtue, self-sacrifice, kindness, self-control, non-anger, nonviolence, patience, and adherence to the norm of righteousness.<sup>3</sup>

Asoka was the grandson of Candragupta, the founder of the Mauryan dynasty (317–189 B.C.E.). Building on the expansionist policies of his forebears, Asoka forges the most far-reaching political unity India was to know until the colonial period, ruling over a vast empire from 270 to 232 B.C.E. Our knowledge of Asoka derives, in part, from commemorative pillar edicts the king erected throughout his kingdom.<sup>4</sup> These edicts, together with the *Asoka Avadāna* (The Story of King Asoka) in Sanskrit, and three Pali works—the *Dīpavaṃsa* (The Island Chronicle), the *Mahāvāṃsa* (The Great Chronicle), and Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Vinaya* (Book of Discipline)—provide a significant, although historically problematical, fund of information about this great Indian ruler. Each source constructs Asoka from its own distinctive perspective.<sup>5</sup>

Asoka's conversion to Buddhism and its consequences becomes the seminal event in the institutional history of Theravada Buddhism, not simply for the development of Buddhism in India, but also for the normative influence of his example on how monarchs in the Theravada cultures of Southeast Asia were depicted. Rulers such as King Kyanzittha of Pagan (eleventh century) and King Tilokaraja of Chiang Mai (fifteenth century) both emulate Asoka, as the chronicles in Burma and Thailand recorded events. By following the example of King Asoka, these rulers not only lend their reign legitimacy and authority in a particular location, they also situate their reign within a universal Buddhist history. The religion they support literally has its roots in the person of the Buddha, whose physical presence magically resides in his relics, and their political rule is grounded in the mythologized career of Asoka who, in turn, is represented as the historical embodiment of the first world ruler.<sup>6</sup> We shall briefly explore the story of Asoka, looking first at the king's reputed conversion to Buddhism for insight into the nature of Buddhist kingship in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

In the ninth year of Asoka's reign, war breaks out between Magadha, the Mauryan heartland, and Kalinga, the most powerful kingdom in India still independent of Asoka's rule. According to rock edict no. 13, Asoka was moved to remorse and pity over the horrors he inflicted on the Kalingans: the slaughter, death by disease, the forcible dislocation of noncombatants, including monks and priests. All these events led to his conversion. Asoka came to believe that the only true conquest was not by force of arms but by the force of the dhamma. Cynics, of course, have observed that Asoka reached this conclusion after he had defeated by military might all those who opposed him.

The precise nature of Asoka's dhamma is a matter of some debate. The legends in the chronicles portray Asoka as an active patron of the monastic order; the convener of the Third Buddhist Council that purged the sangha of sixty thousand heretics; a promoter of the Buddha's teachings; and a monk in his old age. The dhamma of the rock edicts, however, presents a decidedly less religious figure, one moved more by an idealistic, humanitarian philosophy than by Buddhist doctrinal interests.<sup>7</sup> This Asoka advocates docility to parents, liberality to friends, economy in expenditures, and avoidance of disputes (rock edict no. 3). He urges self-mastery, purity of heart, gratitude, and fidelity (rock edict no. 7). Like the *Sigālaka Sutta*, a treatise on lay ethics to which the dhamma of the rock edicts is sometimes compared, Asoka advises right conduct toward servants, honor toward teachers, liberality to brahmins and recluses, and self-restraint toward all living things (rock edicts no. 9 and no. 11). His moral advice is inspiring but not specifically Buddhist: "Man sees but his good deeds, saying: 'This good act have I done.' Man sees not all his evil deeds, saying: 'That bad act have I done; that act is corruption.' Such self-examination is hard. Yet, must a man watch over himself, saying: 'Such and such acts lead to corruption, such are brutality, cruelty, anger, and pride. I will zealously see to it that I slander not out of envy. That will be to my advantage in this world, to my advantage, verily, in the world to come.'"<sup>8</sup>

Even though Asoka's advice in the above passages is quite general, there is little doubt that he was influenced by Buddhist teachings. He commends certain Buddhist texts, the Buddha's teaching in general, and condemns sec-

tarian schism; he also visits the Buddha's birthplace and materially supports the monastic order. If we compare the Buddha and Asoka legends, even the story of Asoka's so-called conversion to Buddhism mirrors the pattern of the Buddha's life story. The structure of the Buddha's life story exemplifies two contrasting yet interdependent modalities—*nibbanic* and *samsaric*. The Buddha's life was one transformed from one dominated by ignorance and attachment to one suffused with knowledge and attentive awareness. Even though one modality (*nibbana*) replaces the other (*samsara*), the former presupposes the latter; in this sense, the two aspects of the story are necessarily interdependent. In a similar manner, Asoka's life story moves from the pole of cruelty, wickedness, and disorder (Canda-Asoka) to one of justice, righteousness, and order (Dhamma-Asoka).

This same polarity is evident in two Pali *sutta* texts from the *Dīgha Nikāya* (The Long Discourses of the Buddha) which treat kingship, the *Aggañña Sutta* (On Knowledge of Beginnings), and the *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* (The Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel). The first justifies the selection of a king, "the great elect" (*mahasammata*), as a necessary means to overcome political, economic, and social disorder brought about by human greed and avarice.<sup>9</sup> The second *sutta* "presents two apocalyptic images of life under the rule of evil and of life ruled by dhamma. The one is a picture of injustice, disorder, and confusion; the other portrays liberation and reciprocity. Both are extended images of the human potential kept in balance, as in the Asoka narrative. From the Buddhist standpoint, neither one can be fully appreciated except in relationship to the other."<sup>10</sup>

The legendary chronicle narratives of the great South and Southeast Asian Buddhist monarchs exhibit the same polarity: after Aniruddha (eleventh century) kills his brother to rule Pagan, he then becomes a patron of Theravada Buddhism;<sup>11</sup> after Tilokaraja (fifteenth century) revolts against his father, the king of Chiang Mai, he subsequently convenes a council to purify the religion (*buddha-sasana*); after Dutthagamani (thirteenth century), the great warrior hero of the *Mahāvamsa*, defeats the Tamils, he unites the island kingdom of Sri Lanka and then builds many of the great religious edifices of Polonnaruva, including the Lohapasada and the great stupa.<sup>12</sup>

The legend of King Asoka not only establishes a structural, bipolar framework for royal biography, his story also functions in an exemplary manner, inspiring other monarchs of Southeast Asia to follow Asoka's example of contributing generously to the monastic order. Reflecting Asokan initiatives, monarchs such as Tilokaraja also convene councils to purify the dhamma, sponsor new redactions of the Pali scriptures, and adjudicate sectarian disputes. Southeast Asian monarchs built stupa reliquaries as loci of popular Buddhist cult and symbolic axial centers of both cosmos and kingdom. As we shall see, material artifacts of Buddhism—stupas, Buddha images, and even votive tablets—become emblems of a ritually based galactic polity linking subordinate states to dominant ones.

The primary Buddhist architectural structure throughout Buddhist Asia is the stupa. It was a cultic center in the early rock-hewn temples in western India; it commemorated miraculous events attributed to the Buddha and Buddhist saints;<sup>13</sup> it became the locus of popular piety and relic veneration of monastic establishments in Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia; and the stupa was closely associated with royal patronage of Buddhist monastic institutions.<sup>14</sup> Scholars have long been drawn to examine the Buddhist stupa's architectural form, historical development, cultic context, and symbolism.<sup>15</sup> The stupa is described by the architect-Indologist Adrian Snodgrass as a network of homologous symbols, myths, rituals, and doctrines that include the stupa as reliquary and memorial, cosmic mountain and navel of the universe, *mandala*-field from which demonic forces have been expelled, generative womb (*gabbha*), and an ascending pathway to liberation. Snodgrass acknowledges his debt to the interpretation of Borobudur by Paul Mus, who posited the microcosmic signification of the stupa as an image of the universe, a view also developed by A. M. Hocart working in Sri Lanka.<sup>16</sup>

Building on the work of Mus and Hocart, John Irwin suggests that, although Buddhism associated the stupa with the death of the Buddha, the archaic, pre-Buddhist meaning of the stupa as life engendering and cosmogonic still prevailed—“[the stupa] is an image of the *creation* of the universe, dynamically conceived.”<sup>17</sup> On the basis of archaeological evidence discovered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the theories of the

renowned American Indologist, W. Norman Brown, Irwin argues for the primacy of the stupa's axis as an *Indra-kila* or World Pillar, reflective of the Vedic myth of Indra's demiurgic act of creation: "Indra's demiurgic act was to slay the demon [Vrtra] and to release the waters, while at the same time separating heaven and earth by 'pushing them apart' and 'propping up the sky' at the world's axis, commonly visualized in India as well as in other traditions as World Tree or World Pillar . . . [w]ith his raising of the heavens, Indra 'pegged' the floating Primordial Mound to the bottom of the Cosmic Ocean, thus 'fixing' or 'stabilising' our universe; the peg he used was the '*Indra-Kila*,' metaphysically synonymous with the World Pillar."<sup>18</sup>

Irwin's interpretation of the centrality of the axial-cosmogonic symbolism of the stupa receives further validation from the association of Buddhist stupas with kings. The appearance of Buddha relics and their enshrinement by the Buddhist monarchs of South and Southeast Asia represents not only an act of piety, but, more important, relics link the king with Indra's cosmogonic act that orders the universe. Some scholars challenge an emphasis on the cosmological significance of the stupa on the grounds that its fundamental meaning should be seen as representing the Buddha's presence in the form of a relic (*dhatu-gabbha*).

Sponsoring stupa construction was a major activity of these Buddhist monarchs. The prevalence of stupa worship was one of the hallmarks of Indian cultural unity during the two-hundred-year period between 270 and 50 B.C.E., the age of the later Mauryas, the Sungas, and the later Andhras of south India. Although the claim that Asoka enshrined relics at 84,000 sites is mythical, its symbolic value points to a basic truth that in the Asokan period the cult of relics became a primary expression of Buddhist piety as well as part of Asoka's policy of using Buddhism as a unifying instrument of imperial power.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, it is quite likely that the very inauguration of the cult of relics described in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* could well have been a sign of the Mauryan age. Some form of stupa cult was pre-Buddhistic, but the veneration of a mound of earth or brickwork containing the remains of nobles and holy men gained greater prominence in Buddhism than in any

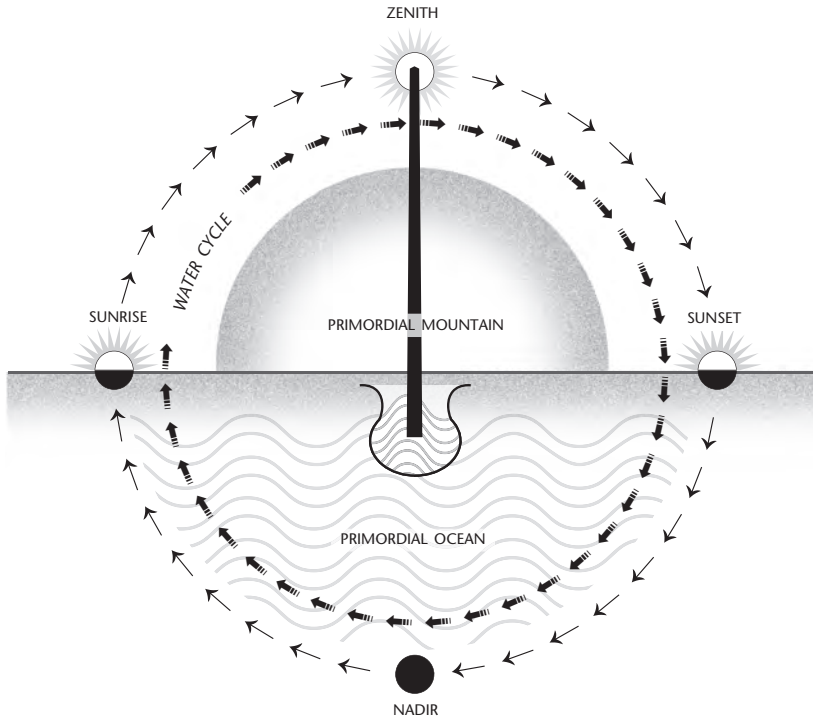


Figure 2.1. *The stupa as microcosm. Drawing adapted from Irwin, 1979, 843.*

other Indian religious tradition. Asokan patronage, as Benjamin Rowland suggests, may have been at least partially responsible for this development.

One of the best-known Indian stupa sites is at Sañci, also known as Caityagiri, located in the modern state of Maharashtra. Sañci is part of a central Indian group of stupas that extend along a commercial route from the imperial capital of Pataliputra to Ujjain and further to the seaport town of Bharukacha. The association of Sañci with Asoka is suggested by an inscribed Asokan pillar thought to have originally stood at Sañci's south gate, although this claim is disputed.<sup>20</sup> Sañci has been studied primarily by art historians; however, it should be remembered that the stupa was not merely an edifice, but also an active, vital center of Buddhist learning and pilgrimage, and for



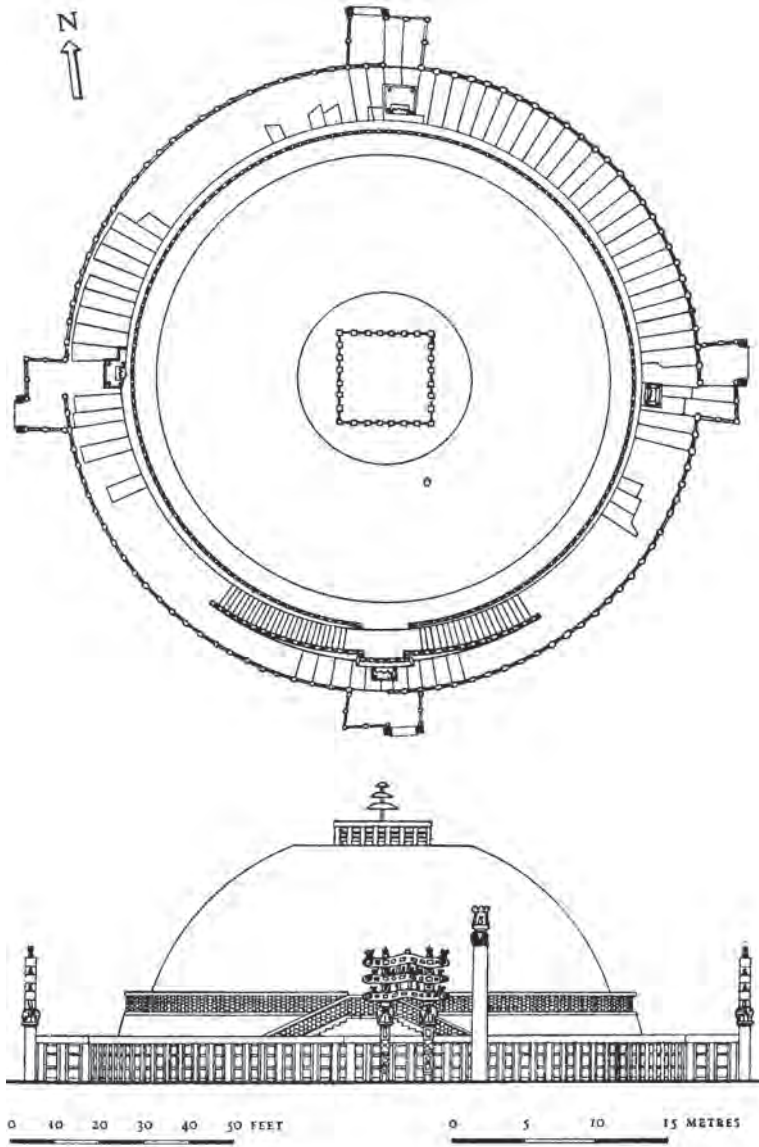


Figure 2.2. Sañci, the great stupa. From Rowland, 1953, 53. Reprinted by permission of Mrs. Benjamin Rowland.

both monastic and lay religious practice from the third century B.C.E. to the tenth century C.E.

Saṅci's prototypical stupa is composed of three major parts: a mound or dome; a raised platform above the base of the dome used for circumambulation; and a stone balustrade encircling the mound at ground level. Gateways are located in the balustrade at the four cardinal points. A quadrangular terrace was added to the top of the dome, and over the dome a parasol was placed as a symbol of imperial power. The four gateways at the cardinal directions indicate the cosmic symbolism of the stupa, as do the terms applied to the dome: *anda*, meaning "egg," and *gabbha*, meaning "womb," which contains the "seed" (*bija*), that is, the relic.<sup>21</sup> In addition to this basic architectural structure, the three Saṅci stupa sites abound in stone sculpture and decorative relief carving, representational scenes from the former lives of the Buddha, and other folk elements.

Such a proliferation of popular art prompted Sukumar Dutt, an Indian scholar of an earlier generation, to see the stupa and the cult associated with it as a "vulgarization" of the tradition: "Shuffling somehow out of the precocity of monkish learning, the religion has taken on a popular aspect. It seems to find in this age a new, perhaps a little 'vulgarised,' expression in its unclerical ritualistic worship, in its motives of art, in attitudes of mind and spirit, often at odds with the approved system of the religion."<sup>22</sup>

The German Indologist, Heinrich Zimmer, modifies Dutt's interpretation of the Buddhist stupa-reliquary. He sees it as a marriage between the highest ideals of Buddhism and local folk religion: "... on the gates and railings, we find a thronging world of forms. Their joyous yet respectful animation is the counterpole to the unembellished quiet of the surface of the dome, illustrating the opposition of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*." Far from being a vulgarization of the tradition, he argues that the "*stūpa* and its form became the highest symbol of the Buddhist faith. It represents the essence of enlightenment, transcendental reality, *nirvāṇa*. Therefore, instead of remaining simply a reliquary memorial filled with sacred bones, ash, or crumbled wood, the silently eloquent structure became a signal of the highest human goal and of the Buddha's attainment."<sup>23</sup>

Whereas Zimmer romanticizes the meaning of the stupa, Dutt conceives of the monument as a vulgar expression of popular piety, drawing too sharp a contrast between monastic and lay Buddhism, between Buddhism's highest ideals and popular practice, and presuming an "original," essentialized Buddhism that, historically, never existed. Irwin's cosmogonic interpretation of the Buddhist stupa, offers an alternative view, one more compatible with the close association between the stupa and Buddhist kingship. Keep in mind that although the Buddhist stupa should not be restricted to a single meaning, for my purpose it represents the symbiotic relationship between sacred cosmology and kingship. The stupa in its structural form suggests that the ruler is empowered or legitimated by his association with the creative-ordering-liberating forces of the universe, whether those forces are Brahmanical deities or the Buddha, and that through this association, the ruler, himself, becomes an active agent in maintaining the order of the universe.

Because Buddhist monarchs of Southeast Asia enshrined Buddha relics in stupas, known as *dagoba* in Sri Lanka and *chedi* in Thailand, they came to represent a magical or supernatural center for the kingdom. In this interpretation, the reliquary mound becomes one modality of the Buddha as cosmocrator, one closely associated with the monarch as world ruler. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the stupa is referred to as a "person-of-dhamma/king-of-dhamma" (*dhammika dhammaraja*), which could be an allusion to King Asoka.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the legend that Asoka redistributed the Buddha's relics in 84,000 stupas throughout India, each located in a political division of his domain, suggests that Asoka governed his realm through a ritual hegemony rather than actual political control.<sup>25</sup> The stupa-reliquary, then, can be seen as the material representation par excellence of both the Buddha and the traditional Southeast Asian Buddhist ruler. Hence, the monument represents the close interrelationship between religion and the state on both historical and symbolic levels.

The stupa's assimilation of royal and religious meaning finds expression throughout mainland Southeast, however, I shall cite only two examples: the Shwezigon in Pagan, Burma, begun by Aniruddha and completed by Kyanzittha at the end of the eleventh century; and Kuenā's enshrinement

of a Buddha relic in the fourteenth century at Wat Phra That located atop Suthep Mountain overlooking the city of Chiang Mai, Thailand.

## KINGS AND COSMOLOGY

Theravada Buddhism influenced the classical conception of kingship in various ways. One was the example of King Asoka valorized as the paradigmatic *dhammaraja*, the righteous monarch who, although a powerful world ruler (*cakkavattin*), governs justly and righteously as the embodiment of the ten royal virtues. According to the Theravada chronicles of Southeast Asia, successful rulers—at least in the eyes of those who composed the chronicles—were those who emulated King Asoka. This suggests that the Asokan model had a mimetic potency: to imitate King Asoka legitimated a ruler as a *dhammaraja*. In particular, Buddhist monarchs built Buddhist edifices, especially stupas, and purified the dhamma and the sangha in self-conscious imitation of King Asoka. By such mimetic repetition, peace and prosperity would be guaranteed in the realm and enable the king to rule as a universal monarch (*cakkavattin*).

Theravada Buddhism informed the classical conception of Southeast Asian kingship in other ways. In his study of Burmese kingship during the Pagan period, Michael Aung-Thwin cites three essential elements in the ideology of classical kingship—the *dhammaraja*, the *kammaraja*, and the *devaraja*. He identifies these elements as human, superhuman, and divine attributes of the king:

By aiding the public's desire for salvation and upward spiritual mobility as a *bodhisatta*; for ruling earthly Tāvatiṃsa—known as Jambudīpa [generally identified with the Indian subcontinent], paradise on earth—as Sakka [Indra]; and for guarding the supernatural dimensions of society as a *nat* [Burmese guardian deity]—for these roles the king acquired a divine image. For administering the state efficiently and morally in the tradition of Asoka and the Mahāsammata . . . he acquired the image of a *dhammarāja*. For successfully conquering the



Figure 2.3. The cetiya (Thai, chedi) at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

familiar world as a *cakkavatti*[n], a ‘universal monarch,’ he enjoyed the image of superhuman. Yet, because he achieved all this by the merits derived from his past actions, he was, above all, a *kammarāja*.<sup>26</sup>

Aung-Thwin’s analysis summarizes several of the Buddhist concepts that informed the political ideology of the classical Buddhist monarchies of Southeast Asia. These concepts were propagated in different ways. For example, kings consulted with the Buddhist sangha, and scholar-monks composed texts that promoted these ideals. Underlying the human, superhuman, and divine dimensions of classical Buddhist political ideology, however, is the notion of mimesis. By imitating Asoka, the ruler actually represents the “great elect” or “world conqueror.” It appears, moreover, that in the construction of palaces, temples, and capitals, as well as the organization of state and society, a similar mimetic principle was operative. That is, these structures and their

polities were not merely microcosmic symbols of the macrocosmos; by their imitation of the macrocosmos in a virtual reality sense, they embodied the very laws governing the cosmos.

My emphasis on the mimetic import of classical Southeast Asian religio-political centers is a variation of Robert von Heine-Geldern's construction of the parallelism between the suprahuman macrocosmos and the human microcosmos in which the kingdom represents the cosmos.<sup>27</sup> Heine-Geldern refers to a "magical" relationship between the human realm and the universe, between terrestrial manifestations on the one hand and the points of the compass and the heavens on the other. In this schema everything has a "magical position" and a "magical moment" in the structure and movement of the universe: "Humanity was forever in the control of cosmic forces. This concept was applied to social groups . . . Kingdom, city, monastery, nothing could prosper unless it was in harmony with these universal forces. In order to achieve this harmony, men tried to build the kingdom, the capital, the palace, the temple, in the form of microcosmos . . . replicas of the structure of the universe."<sup>28</sup>

What happens when we apply a mimetic interpretation to three major Southeast Asian religio-political centers: Angkor in Cambodia, Pagan in Burma, and Sukhothai in Siam? These centers and their spectacular monuments represent high points in the development of their respective cultures. They can and should be assessed as expressions of increasingly powerful and centralized states "which [according to Charles Higham] were the foci of intensified centralisation, incorporation of surrounding groups by force . . . The indigenous inhabitants incorporated into their culture Indian-inspired ideas of statehood. These included a legal system, calendrics and the establishment of a mandala-wide religion."<sup>29</sup>

Paul Mus, a seminal interpreter of the religion and culture of Southeast Asia, argues that the imposition of Buddhism or Hinduism as a state religion and the creation of a sacred capital city were crucial elements in a sovereign's strategy to create a centralized state that brought together cadastral cults and plural communities into a unified pattern.<sup>30</sup> The anthropologist, S. J. Tambiah,

suggests that Buddhism forged a macroconception that yoked religion and the sociopolitical order in which kingship was the articulating principle.<sup>31</sup>

To interpret these centers and their monuments simply as material evidence of powerful, centralized political states ignores their symbolic value and mimetic potency as sacred space—representations in a *mandala* form of vertical and horizontal world-planes regulated from the pinnacle of the central axis by embodiments of both divine and royal power. As argued by scholars such as Heine-Geldern, George Coedès, Mus, and Tambiah, these monuments reflect Hindu and Buddhist polities modeled on cosmological notions and parallelism between the suprahuman macrocosmos and the human microcosmos. Tambiah asserts: “The Kingdom was a miniature representation of the cosmos, with the palace at the center being iconic of Mount Meru, the pillar of the universe, and the king, his princes and ruling chiefs representing the hierarchy in Tāvatiṃsa heaven—Indra, the four *lokapāla* (world guardians), and twenty-eight subordinate *devas*.”<sup>32</sup>

Tambiah builds on the research of R. Moertono on medieval Java and H. L. Shorto’s study of the medieval Mon kingdom in Burma to characterize the classical Southeast Asian polities that were modeled on this mandalic scheme as “galactic,” a dynamic structure of peripheral and tributary states subject to a dominant center. In particular, Tambiah contends that a thirty-three unit galactic polity reached its most complex development in Buddhist Southeast Asia. To illustrate his point, he refers to the Mon scheme of thirty-two townships organized around the capital of Hamsavati (Pegu in Burma) and a thirty-three unit Burmese hierarchical political structure that includes the king, four ministers, and twenty-eight regional chiefs.<sup>33</sup> Tambiah contends that these schemes reflect the Buddhist notions of the thirty-three heavenly realms as well as the divine hierarchy of Indra (Sakka), the four world guardians, and the twenty-eight *devas*.

In the following discussion of kingship and religious cosmology, we shall analyze the ancient capitals of Angkor, Pagan, and Sukhothai primarily as unique combinations of three interrelated symbol systems: the cosmic, the divine, and the royal. Concepts enhancing royal status—the world ruler (*cakkavattin*), king of righteousness (*dhammaraja*), a Buddha-to-be (*bodhisatta*),



and the god-king (*devaraja*) or Buddha-king (*buddharaja*)—inform the meanings attributed to these centers together with their palaces, temples, and stupas. The meaning of the *devaraja* concept, which we associate primarily with Khmer imperial rule, has been a particular focus of study and debate.<sup>34</sup> Why has this concept figured so prominently in discussions of religious cosmologies and kingship in Southeast Asia?

In its basic formulation, the *devaraja* concept stands for the divinization of a ruler. Upon his death the ruler becomes the apotheosis of a divine being, which could be one of the Hindu gods, Shiva or Vishnu, or the Buddha Lokeshvara. George Coedès, the French doyen of Southeast Asian culture of an earlier generation, gives this interpretation of the *devaraja* in his study of Angkor: “From all evidence it is safe to say that it was the king who was the great god of ancient Cambodia, the one to whom the biggest groups of monuments and all the temples in the form of mountains were dedicated.”<sup>35</sup> Lawrence Briggs holds the same view, asserting that the central divinity of the state cult of ancient Cambodia was the king himself, and that he was looked upon as a manifestation of Shiva, a god-king whose visible symbol was a *linga* located upon the central altar of a pyramidal temple, the symbolic center of the empire, in imitation of Mount Meru.<sup>36</sup>

Other scholars qualify such a specific claim, asserting that in the case of Hinduism the ruler was considered to be either an incarnation of a god or a descendant from a god or both. In the case of Theravada Buddhism, the king became a representative of the god Indra through good karma acquired in past lives.<sup>37</sup> This formulation of the *devaraja*/*buddharaja* concept has the virtue of giving wider latitude in interpreting the specific nature of the association between the “*raja*” (king), “*deva*” (god), or “*buddha*.”

A major challenge to identifying the *devaraja* concept with kingship comes from those scholars who contend that the notion of the *devaraja* in Angkor refers to Shiva as the “king of the gods” rather than to a divine monarch or a god-king.<sup>38</sup> Others argue for a separation of the *devaraja* concept from the cult of royal *lingas*, which became the basis for the Angkorian state cult from the eleventh century.<sup>39</sup> Although a consensus has yet to be reached regarding the precise meaning of the *devaraja* concept and its related concept, the *buddharaja*,

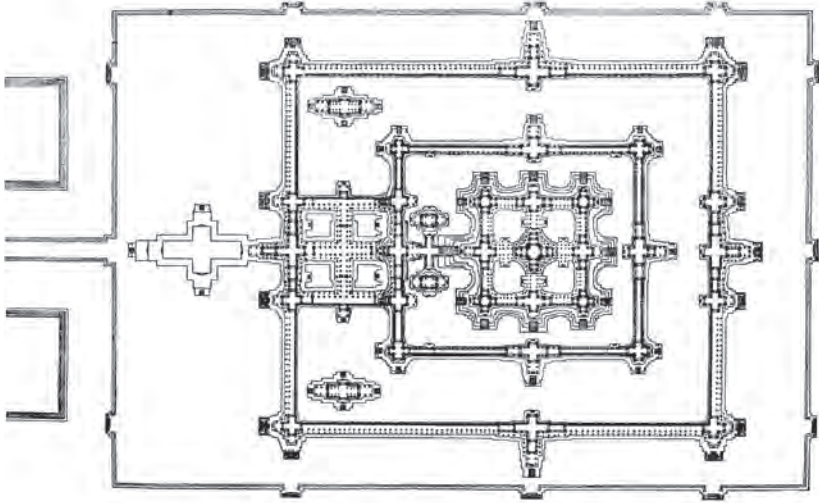


it is likely that the terms link king and god (e.g., Shiva, Vishnu) or king and Buddha at the center of a mimetically potent replica of the universe.

## Angkor

The monuments of the Khmer empire, constructed between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, first captured the imagination of European travelers and scholars because of the vastness of the site, and the overwhelming size and dynamism of Angkor Wat that adjoins the last great Khmer capital, Angkor Thom, dominated by its central temple, the Bayon.<sup>40</sup> The awesome grandeur of Angkor Wat prompted A. K. Coomaraswamy to comment that the observer could not help but be overwhelmed by a feeling of the monument's "nervous tension" and "concentration of force."<sup>41</sup> The association of the *devaraja* concept with the religious cosmology of the Khmer empire, furthermore, has enhanced the significance of Angkor for the historian of religion who studies the relationship between sacred cosmology and political authority.

From a historical point of view, scholars speculate that the notion of *devaraja* first originated in Funan, a kingdom founded in the first century C.E. in the lower Mekong Valley. The Chinese word, *fu-nan*, could derive from the Mon-Khmer word, *bnam*, which means "mountain," with specific reference to a cult of a national guardian spirit established by the founder of the state.<sup>42</sup> Under the Khmers this cult acquired a Hinduized meaning during the reign of Jayavarman II (accession, 802 C.E.) when Shaivism became the state religion, a transformation that could have been mediated through Java. Jayavarman linked Shiva worship with kingship, assuming the role of a universal monarch who governs both the spiritual and temporal realms. He made his royal chaplain the chief priest (*purohita*) of the *devaraja* cult on a hereditary basis. This ensured continuance of this tradition until the reign of Suryavarman I (1002–1050 C.E.) who added Mahayana Buddhist elements to the state *devaraja* cult.



*Figure 2.4. Angkor Wat near Siem Riep, Cambodia. Angkor Wat ground plan reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.*

H. G. Quartich Wales interprets the *devaraja* cult as a synthesis of an indigenous Southeast Asian worldview with Hinduism, but he gives primacy to the chthonic significance of autochthonous mountain symbolism. Wales suggests that the Khmer *devaraja* cult is a synthesis of Indian-Shaivite ideas of divinity and kingship with older Southeast Asian megalithic beliefs. He contends that when the pre-Indianized peoples of Southeast Asia erected stone megaliths, they recognized the consubstantial presence of the first ancestor-earth god in the stone as themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Wales finds evidence for this chthonic character of Shiva among the Khmers in such epithets as Girisa, “the mountain Lord,” and Gambhiresvara, “Shiva of the depths.” He argues that the development of the temple mountain in Khmer architecture up to the construction of the Bayon points to a displacement of the Hindu Mount Meru with a more realistic and primordial representation of the sacred mountain. In Wales’s interpretation, then, the Khmer temple mountain represents a revival, albeit one transformed by Indian thought, of the chthonic source of divine and royal power.<sup>44</sup> George Coedès contends that the cult of divinized royalty was the source of inspiration for the grand monuments of ancient Cambodia.<sup>45</sup>

The meaning of the Bayon has been much contested by Western scholars. Its architectural form, bas-reliefs, and the iconic visage dominating the structure suggest an assimilation of Indic gods, local deities, and Mahayana Buddhism. The huge faces staring down from a series of great towers, first identified with Brahma, are now widely considered to be Lokeshvara, although a new hypothesis argues on both iconic and comparative historical grounds for Tantric Vajrayana influence.<sup>46</sup> While acknowledging diverse views regarding the iconographic and historical significance of the Bayon, I follow the theory that the faces incorporate both Buddhist and royal meanings.

After Mahayana Buddhism spread to Angkor in the eleventh century, Suryavarman II began construction of a Buddhist temple on the site that would later become the Bayon, the great temple identified primarily with the royal power of Jayavarman VII (r. 1181–ca. 1219). Although the site continued to be developed under Hindu influence after Jayavarman’s death, what may have been a fully developed *buddharaja* cult rooted in this earlier

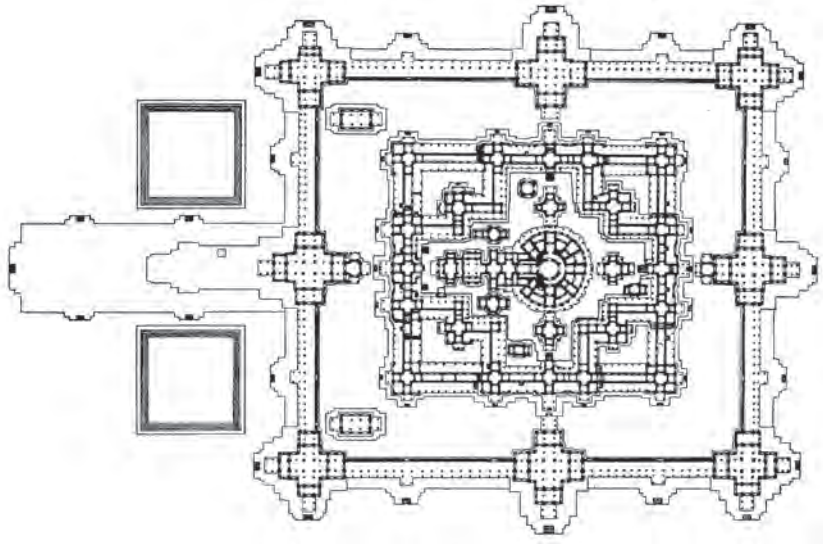


Figure 2.5. The Bayon Temple of Angkor Thom near Siem Riep, Cambodia. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

infusion of Mahayana Buddhism developed during his reign. Whether or not the *buddharaja* cult, which the Bayon temple may embody, represents a cult of a divinized ruler or veneration of the Buddha as divine ruler is not a settled issue; nonetheless, the mandalic structure and iconography of the monument bear testimony to a complex interrelationship between sacred cosmology, the Khmer state, and Jayavarman's political authority.

Both Angkor Wat and the Bayon exemplify the Khmer synthesis of cosmology and kingship. Sometimes known as the Great Temple, Angkor Wat proper covers an area of approximately five hundred acres; furthermore, it is part of a more extensive complex of monuments of over ten thousand acres. Constructed under the reign of Suryavarman II (1113–1150 C.E.), the monument was dedicated to the Hindu god, Vishnu. Subsequently it became a sacred Buddhist site, especially following the conquest by the Siamese in the fifteenth century.

Angkor Wat rises from the ground in its mandalic form as an embodiment of the suprahuman macrocosmos and the human microcosmos. It represents

simultaneously the image of the universe, the celestial paradise of Vishnu, and the heavenly palace of the spirit of the king.<sup>47</sup> The moat surrounding the structure is approximately two hundred yards wide and twenty-five feet deep. The temple itself, symbolizing the earth in its quadrangular plan and guarded by four massive enclosures, rises as Mount Meru, the central mountain of the universe, to the celestial spheres of the realm of the god Vishnu. A bridge spans the moat on the west leading pilgrims through the main gate of the outer wall and gallery over a paved causeway to a cruciform terrace in front of the main entrance to the temple. The temple itself ascends in three successive terraces to a height of over 180 feet. In the center of the innermost terrace stands an enormous pyramidal foundation supporting the five ultimate towers accessible only by steep, narrow stone steps.<sup>48</sup> The three basic cosmological components of Angkor Wat are the central tower or *axis mundi*, the surrounding wall, and the moat. The latter two represent the alternating mountain ranges and oceans that divide the horizontal plane in the Indian cosmological schema.<sup>49</sup>

In comparison with other Khmer classical monuments, Angkor Wat has garnered the greatest share of popular and scholarly attention; however, the Bayon is an even more apt example of the complex, intricate interweaving of Buddhism, state, and kingship. The splendor and mystery of the Bayon has been noted by all who have seen it: “an architectural wonder of the first order” (Doudart de Lagée); “the most extraordinary of all the Khmer ruins” (Louis Delaporte); “a structure absolutely unique of its kind” (Tissandier); and Pierre Loti’s memorable, “I looked up at the tree-covered towers which dwarfed me, when all of a sudden my blood curdled as I saw an enormous smile looking down on me and another smile over another wall, then three, then five, then ten, appearing from every direction.”<sup>50</sup> Even though these romantic paecans come from an earlier generation of scholars, yet I, too, found the Bayon overwhelmingly mysterious and fascinating when I first visited Angkor Thom.

The Bayon is located at the geometric center of the greatest and last of the Khmer capitals, Angkor Thom. It dominates an extensive array of religious and royal stone structures located within the huge walls of the capital.





*Figure 2.6. Jayavarman VII.  
The Bayon, Angkor Thom,  
Cambodia. Sketch by Namo.*

According to Coedès, the Bayon evolved over time from a cruciform-shaped temple in the capital to a rectangular temple-mountain crowded with towers surrounding a central pediment. Emerging from each of the four sides of the towers just below their lotus crown is the benign, smiling visage of the face that so captured Pierre Loti's imagination when he first saw the temple.

Western scholarly debates over the significance of the faces on the towers of the Bayon have ranged from the four faces of Brahma to the five faces of Shiva. Coedès and Mus interpret the temple and its faces as symbols of royal power blessing the four quarters of the land.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Coedès contends that the discovery in 1933 of a large Lokeshvara image in the central sanctuary of the Bayon not only proves that the structure was a temple dedicated to Lokeshvara, but also that the face of the image, as well as those on the towers,

represents an apotheosis of King Jayavarman VII in the form of the Buddha. In a more extended analysis of the entire structure, Mus contends that the temple represented a galactic, mimetic *mandala*: "Perhaps each tower corresponded to . . . a religious or administrative centre of the province. Thus . . . the four faces symboliz[ing] the royal power spreading over the land in every direction . . . signified that Jayavarman II's royal power was as strong in the provinces as at Angkor itself. . . . We now begin to understand this mysterious architecture as the symbol of the Great Miracle of Jayavarman VII. It represents his administrative and religious power extending to every corner of Cambodian territory by means of this unique sign."<sup>52</sup>

Mus's galactic interpretation receives further confirmation from an Angkor inscription indicating that Jayavarman dispatched twenty-three stone images of himself portrayed as the Buddha (the Jaya Buddha Mahanatha) to such far flung Khmer outposts as Sukhothai in north-central Siam. Jayavarman's extensive empire, like King Asoka's kingdom fifteen hundred years earlier, was conjoined by such symbolic gestures as the installation of Jaya Buddha Mahanatha images of the *buddharaja*, as well as by material services. For example, in regard to the latter, Jayavarman sponsored the building of an extensive system of roads equipped with more than one hundred rest houses and a sophisticated system of reservoirs.

## Pagan

In the following discussion of kingship and cosmology in Southeast Asia, the focus shifts to the Burmese kingdom of Pagan (eleventh to thirteenth centuries) and the Siamese kingdom of Sukhothai (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) where the influence of Theravada Buddhism eventually overshadowed other Buddhist and Brahmanical influences.<sup>53</sup> Theravada Buddhism also played a dominant role in other classical Southeast Asian kingdoms, notably the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya and the northern city-state of Chiang Mai in Siam, Lan Chang (Luang Prabang) in Laos, and Pegu in Burma.

Under King Aniruddha (r. 1044–1077), Pagan became the dominant kingdom in Burma. Located in the central region of that country in a plain near the confluence of the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin Rivers, the city-state eventually covered an area of approximately sixteen square miles where the remains of over two thousand extant sites can still be seen. While no single monument at Pagan can match the majestic grandeur of Angkor Wat or the iconographic complexity of Borobudur, the size and extent of its monuments are overwhelming and incomparable.<sup>54</sup> That Pagan was situated only thirty miles from Mount Popa, the home of the most powerful guardian deities, the Mahagiri *nats*, venerated by the Burmese, also suggests an assimilation between the Mount Meru symbolism of Indian Buddhist cosmology and an ancient cult of mountain spirits.<sup>55</sup>

The temples and stupas of Pagan vary greatly in architectural style, blending Indian, Pyu, Mon, and Sinhalese motifs with the unique genius of the Burmese. The Shwezigon begun by Aniruddha and completed by his grandson, Kyanzittha in 1086, is believed to enshrine three sacred Buddha relics: his collarbone, frontlet bone, and a tooth.<sup>56</sup> Aniruddha brought to Pagan one of the relics from the Baw-baw-kyi stupa in the Pyu center of Thaton. In return he left votive tablets and *jataka* plaques, a custom he practiced throughout his kingdom. By this reciprocal action, Pagan as the sacred center of the Burmese kingdom incorporated peripheral states into its orbit. Aniruddha enshrined Buddha relics and brought Buddha images, monks, and texts from conquered states.

During the Pagan period, the Shwezigon, located near the king's palace, Jayabhumi or Place of Victory, functioned as a national shrine. In the tradition of the stupa-reliquary described earlier, by its relic it represents the person of the Buddha as well as the qualities of the Buddhist world ruler. Inscriptions refer to Aniruddha as a *cakkavattin* and ascribe to his grandson and successor, Kyanzittha, an even more grandiose title, Sri Tribhuvanadityadhammaraja, which means "The Blessed Buddhist King, Sun of the Three Worlds." Paul Strachan's interpretation of the Shwezigon suggests the mimetic potency of the stupa. With its three circumambulatory terraces, bell-shaped dome, and four stairways facing the cardinal directions, the Shwezigon is not simply an



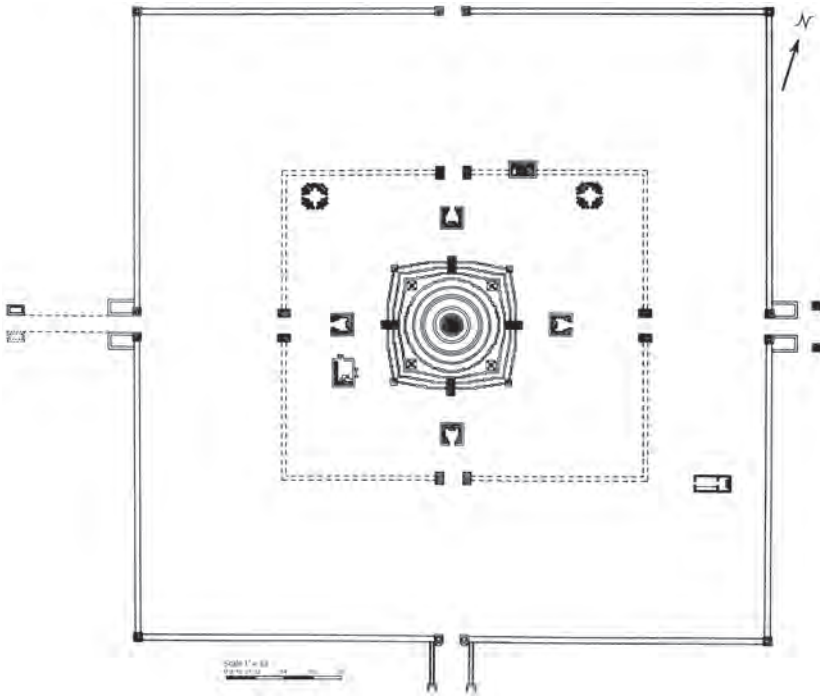
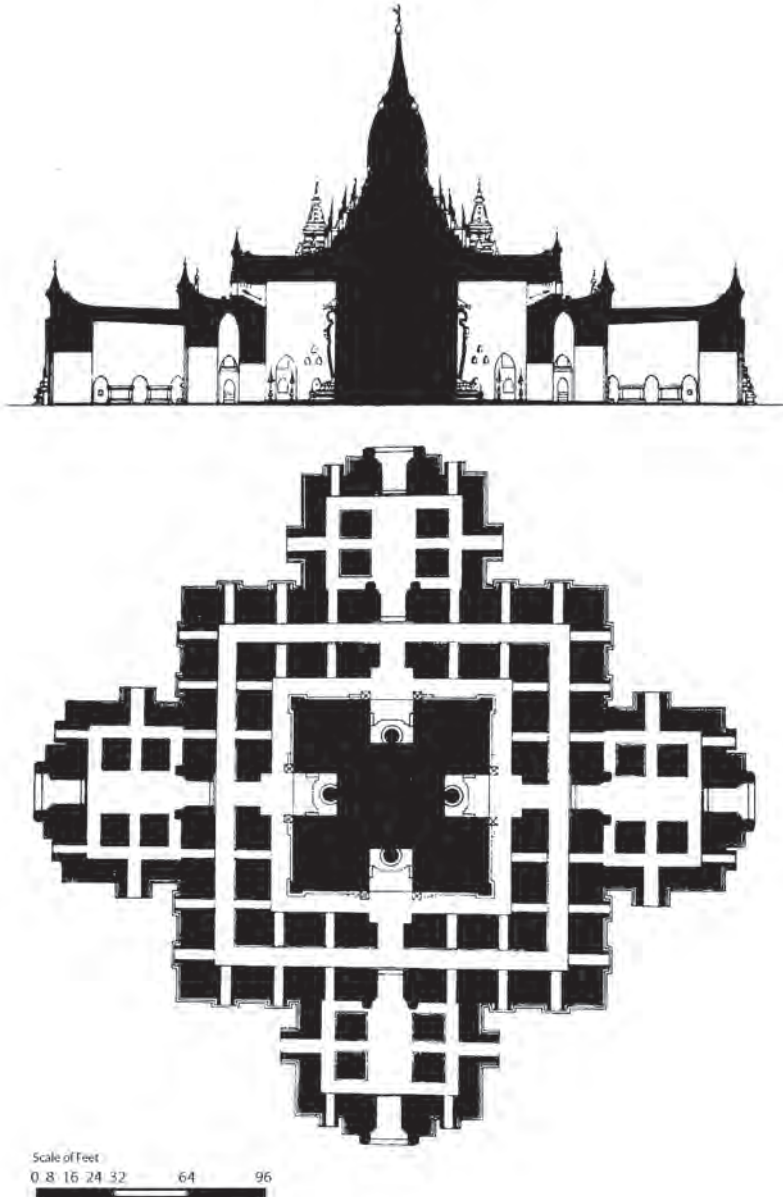


Figure 2.7. The Shwezigon stupa. Pagan, Myanmar. Reprinted by permission of J. J. Augustin.

architectural imitation of a cosmic mountain; rather, mimetically it *is* the cosmic mountain.<sup>57</sup>

The Shwezigon and other Pagan stupas, such as the Mingala-zedi (1274 C.E.), share with the Borobudur stupa (see appendix 2) a common structure: a truncated pyramidal terraced base with angled towers and a central stairway on each side that supports a central circular dome. As is true of Borobudur, the terraces of the stupas of Pagan serve both a practical and a symbolic function. There are open-air galleries from which the pilgrim can view depictions of Buddhist scenes, or as in the case of Pagan's monuments, episodes from the *jatakas*. The monuments invite the pilgrim "to ascend the tower gradually, moving clockwise around its terraces in a symbolic pilgrim-



*Figure 2.8. The Ananda Temple. Pagan, Myanmar. Reprinted by permission of J. J. Augustin.*

age of ascent rising from the ground level of earthly everyday life to higher and higher spheres.”<sup>58</sup>

The central monument of Pagan, however, is not a stupa-reliquary but the Ananda Temple completed by King Kyanzittha who reigned from 1084 until his death in 1113.<sup>59</sup> Constructed of brick and plaster in a cruciform design, the main base is surmounted by two receding curvilinear roofs and four receding terraces, crowned by a spire in the form of a miter-like pyramid known as a *sikhara*.<sup>60</sup> The core of the interior is dominated by an enormous cube rising to the spire, which is surrounded by two galleries. On each side of the cube stands a colossal figure representing the four Buddhas of this world age. Their huge size in a relatively confined place conveys a sense of the Buddha’s omnipresence throughout space and time. The Ananda, like the Dhammayangyi Temple and several others, combines both cave and cosmic mountain symbolism. According to *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, the Ananda Temple replicates an ascetic’s cave located on Mount Gandamadana in a mythological Himalayan setting. Its gilded spire suggests two meanings: the top of a magic mountain, or flames of fiery energy generated by the four meditating Buddhas inside the cave.

The Ananda Temple links Buddhist cosmology and kingship. In the opinion of one interpreter of Southeast Asian culture, the monument symbolizes King Kyanzittha’s desire to realize his own apotheosis as a divine being in a way similar to that of his contemporaries in Cambodia: “We can . . . see the Ananda as a funerary temple for Kyanzittha. It represents a model of cosmic reality, a world wherein dwell those who have achieved enlightenment. Kyanzittha has spent his life as a *bodhisattva* and on his death he achieves translation into the realm of the Buddhas.”<sup>61</sup> Located inside the temple is a small image of Kyanzittha that depicts the crowned monarch as a pious devotee of the Buddha, and inscriptions indicate that he saw himself as a *bodhisattva*, a *cakkavattin*, and an incarnation of the god Vishnu.

The power achieved by Southeast Asian monarchs was enhanced and reinforced by various religious and cosmically based notions such as the god-king, the world ruler, and the Buddha-to-be. In the Khmer empire, *devaraja* and *buddharaja* cults appear to have been a significant feature of political legiti-

mation and power. Certainly, the fact that monarchs such as Jayavarman VII and Kyanzittha were claimants to extramundane status and at death were apotheosized into divine beings, served to reinforce their sovereign authority. These monuments built to glorify the monarchs who ordered their construction also functioned as magical centers of both the state and the cosmos, and in symbolizing the spiritual attainments of the monarch, they pointed to the ultimate goal of all aspirants to enlightenment and perfection.

## Sukhothai

Sukhothai, located approximately 280 miles north of Bangkok in north-central Thailand, was one of the first major capitals of Siam.<sup>62</sup> Originally built as a Khmer outpost, Sukhothai was conquered by Tai tribes led by Si Indradit in the mid-thirteenth century. Together with its twin city, Si Satchanalai, Sukhothai remained a center of Tai power until the end of the fourteenth century when it came under the control of the neighboring Tai state of Ayutthaya.

The city plan was derived from the formal layout of royal Khmer cities at Angkor—an inner city surrounded by three concentric earth ramparts separated by moats covering an area of nearly two square miles—but it evolved into a distinctively Tai religious-royal center. In the late thirteenth century during the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng, the axial center of the city was the Manasilapatra, a stepped pyramid where the king granted audiences and monks preached the dhamma. The structure may have developed from the Kon Laeng, a stepped altar on which offerings were made to the city's guardian deity (Thai, *phi muang*) during the reign of Si Indradit.<sup>63</sup> The Manasilapatra represented a sacred, mythical plateau in the Himalayas and was the center of the ceremonial city defined by its triple ramparts, four large gates at the cardinal directions, and various Buddhist monuments marking other directions. The transformation of Sukhothai continued during the reign of Ramkhamhaeng's successor, King Dhammaraja (Loethai), when the

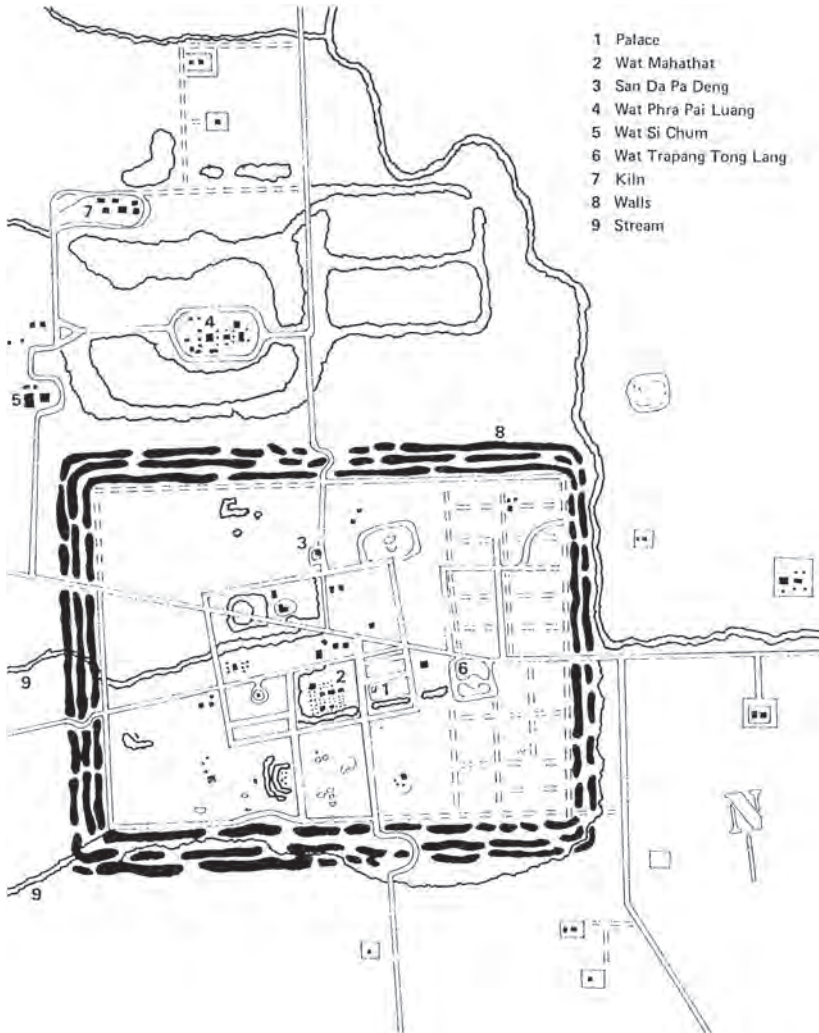


Figure 2.9. Sketch plan of the city of Sukhothai with Wat Mahathat at the center. From Stratton and Scott, 1981, 11. Reprinted by permission of the Stratton/Scott archives.

capital was restored as a ceremonial center under the direction of Somdet Phra Mahathera Si Satha, a former prince become monk.

Around 1330 C.E. a slender, lotus bud tower enshrining a Buddha relic was built atop Ramkhamhaeng's pyramid in the center of the city, thereby turning it into a Buddhist stupa.<sup>64</sup> In the early 1340s, Si Satha expanded the stupa to enshrine two Buddha relics he brought back from Sri Lanka where he had resided for a decade. He also added four axial towers. More than two hundred buildings were constructed around the stupa itself, which became known as Wat Mahathat, the Monastery of the Great Relics. This pattern of constructing a reliquary stupa or *cetiya* as the symbolic and ceremonial center of the kingdom typifies the development of Tai city-states.

Although the story of the material representations of kings and cosmology presented in this section culminates in the great Siamese capital of Ayutthaya (fifteenth to eighteenth centuries), it is particularly germane to the topic of Buddhist kingship and cosmology to conclude with a brief look at King Lithai (Mahadhammaraja I) who reigned at Sukhothai from 1347 to 1361 C.E. He was the author of the *Traibhūmikathā* (The Three Worlds), regarded as the first systematic Theravada cosmological treatise and the first truly literary work written by a Siamese.<sup>65</sup> Lithai's treatise is as much a discussion of Buddhist kingship as it is a picture of the thirty-one realms or levels of the Buddhist cosmology.

Lithai was most interested in the fifth and seventh levels of this cosmological scheme—the realm of the four great continents and the realm of Tavatimsa, the heavenly abode of the thirty-three gods. Both realms are ruled by kings, the *cakkavattin* and Indra, the same kings as noted in the discussion of King Asoka who serve as models for Southeast Asian Buddhist monarchs. The *cakkavattin* rules in the human realm and Indra reigns in Tavatimsa Heaven: “In emulation of Indra, whose palace is regally situated at the exact tip of the cosmic Mount Meru, Theravāda kings traditionally build their palaces at the symbolic centres of their kingdoms. Thus, the earthly king himself becomes Indra.”<sup>66</sup>

THE COSMOLOGICAL SCHEME  
OF THE THREE WORLDS



Figure 2.10. Based on the Traibhūmikathā. Permission granted by Oxford University Press.

Lithai was most influenced by the model of the *cakkavattin* who attains his position through the virtues of his past meritorious lives and who rules justly and compassionately in accordance with the dhamma. Like the mighty *cakkavattin* who conquers the four continents with his armies, Lithai conquered Sukhothai and sought to establish his authority over a widespread territory. Over half of the fourteen years of his reign was spent out of the city. He built distinctive lotus bud *ceitya* towers in outlying centers as tangible signs of the spiritual links binding together capital, province, and vassal states.<sup>67</sup> A giant wheel (*cakka*) and the Phra Buddha Singha, a palladium image, accompanied the king on his travels.<sup>68</sup> These practices parallel the installation of the Jaya Buddha Mahanatha image by Jayavarman VII in outlying centers of his empire and Aniruddha's custom of enshrining votive tablets and *jataka* plaques throughout the territories over which he exercised suzerainty, thereby serving the purpose of creating a loosely structured ritual hegemony.

Stupas and relics legitimated Lithai's territorial rights; the wheel and the Buddha image that accompanied him further reinforced his claims over the network of states beyond the royal capital. Lithai also sought to unite his newly forged kingdom by distributing Buddha images, relics, and Buddha footprints incised with the 108 cosmologically potent supernatural signs. In effect, he created a ritual unity joined together by a cult of sacred relics, images, footprints, and monks in which "the monks who accompanied a sacred relic [and image] in its passage through the country helped strengthen the nexus between outlying centers and the capital."<sup>69</sup>

The historical legacy of King Ramkhamhaeng and his grandson, Lithai, has been influential in the processes of national integration and political legitimation in the modern period. It has even been argued that King Ramkhamhaeng's famous stele inscription depicting a strong, benevolent, *dhammaraja* king holding audiences with his subjects and presiding over a prosperous realm was, in fact, fabricated during the reign of King Mongkut on the eve of Siam's political and economic modernization.<sup>70</sup> It has even been proposed that King Lithai's *Traibhūmikathā* was not authored by him as a Buddhist political charter before he overthrew the usurper of the Sukhothai throne and restored the kingdom's fortunes, but rather, that this cosmologi-



cal treatise on the ethics of kingship was written instead during the reign of Rama I (r. 1782–1809) to bolster a Siamese monarchy devastated by the Burmese sack of Ayutthaya.<sup>71</sup>

Even though these particular historical reconstructions are not supported by most scholars, it is certainly the case that at those two turning points in modern Thai history—the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries—Buddhism provided a critical basis for maintaining a sense of national identity in the face of severe challenges. In recent times, the *Traibhūmikathā* has been invoked by conservative, neotraditional groups to support the continuance of power by the ruling Thai elites and liberal voices calling for greater and more rapid democratization. These later voices reconstruct the political institutions and cultural products of Sukhothai as providing for a “true Buddhist model of participatory, liberal form of government.”<sup>72</sup>

In conclusion, a brief postscript about the disjunction between the period of the cosmologically grounded Southeast Asian states and the present age may be useful. In his lectures on Angkor at the Musée Louis Finot in Hanoi before World War II, George Coedès observed, “I hope I have made it clear . . . that the arrangement of a Khmer city and its architecture and decoration were governed by a whole series of magic and religious beliefs, and not determined by utilitarian or aesthetic aims. To understand these monuments one has to be acquainted with the mythological images on which they were modelled.”<sup>73</sup>

Does the fragmentation that characterizes our postmodern worldview undermine our ability to truly understand the supernaturally charged, symbolically integrated cosmos of Jayavarman VII, Kyanzitha, or King Lithai? Possibly. The broad and deep comprehension of the religiously grounded worlds of Angkor, Pagan, and Sukhothai requires both knowing history and having a sense of empathy and imagination. To enter into their cosmological milieu demands not that we suspend critical rationality, but rather, that we integrate such analysis into an empathetic understanding of these classic cultural, political, and religious centers and what they represented in the lives of those who lived, worshipped, and ruled there. These splendid

sites are not only great architectural and artistic monuments; they are also systems of mimetic empowerment.

### THE BUDDHA AS COSMOCRATOR

As Steven Collins rightly argues, the relationships between religious and political institutions are characterized by tension and conflict, or in his words, “antagonistic symbiosis,” as well as cooperation and mutual support. In regard to classical Theravada Buddhism, to discriminate between these dynamics requires a subtle reading of Buddhist texts—alert to nuance and irony—to discern these differences. On the side of cooperation and mutual support, Collins points out that the two institutions are partners “in the discursive enunciation of order,” and that “in constructing and maintaining an objectified, routinized heritage-conscious tradition, it was part of their task to celebrate the aspiration to, and . . . achievement of, peaceful, civilized social existence.”<sup>74</sup>

Collin’s observation applies to all civilizational religions. Among the great historical religions—Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism—aspects of this symbiotic interrelationship include state support of religious institutions, a religious cosmology that legitimates political status such as divine right of kings, and a similitude between the mythologized portraits of political and religious leaders. In classical religious cultures the lines between the secular and the sacred, the political and the religious are often blurred, whether constructed as antagonistic or complementary. While acknowledging the antagonistic side of the symbiosis between the Buddhist sangha and monarchial states in South and Southeast Asia, the following discussion focuses on the symbolic complementarity that exists between the religious and political, Buddha and monarch, sangha and state.

Imperial support of Buddhism during the Mauryan period, especially during the reign of King Asoka, inevitably coupled Buddhism and political rule, in particular, linking the institutional fortunes of the monastic order with the state. In this process, the Buddha and king become virtual mirror

images of one another. In the Pali texts we find the following: the Buddha appears as a king in previous lives; at Prince Siddhattha's birth, sages predict that the royal child will be either a world ruler or a fully enlightened Buddha; the Buddha predicts King Asoka's appearance, thereby legitimating his rule; Asoka becomes a model for Buddhist kingship throughout Southeast Asia by his conversion to Buddhism, by calling a council to purify the dhamma and the sangha, and by building *cetiya*s to enshrine Buddha relics; kingship in Theravada Buddhism presupposes many lifetimes of preparation as does Buddhahood; the ten royal virtues share much in common with the moral perfections associated with exalted spiritual achievement; the same amount of merit must be accumulated in previous lives by a Buddha and a *cakkavattin*; the same miracles occur at the birth of both; both have the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the *mahapurisa*; and in the Theravada tradition bodhisattahood is associated with both Buddhahood and kingship.

In one sense, both the king and the Buddha bear primary responsibility for the well-being of their respective realms—the worldly (*lokiya*) sphere of proximate goods and the religious sphere (*lokuttara*) of ultimate goods, a relationship that has been referred to as “the two wheels of *dhamma*.”<sup>75</sup> On a more subtle level, however, the Theravada tradition constructs kingship in the image of the Buddha and Buddhahood in the image of the king with power being the key denominator.

In our earlier examination of the consecration of a Buddha image, we saw the crucial significance of the sacred power associated with the person of the Buddha. This power manifests itself in several other ways. In classical Theravada texts such as the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (The Buddha's Great Decease), we find the themes of the Buddha as teacher and supernatural miracle worker interwoven. The cult of Buddha relics and their association with ruling monarchs discussed in this important text bear testimony to the sacred power believed to be latent in the physical remains of the great teacher. As will be shown, the cult of relics figures prominently in a consideration of this topic. The Buddha as consecrator of the land plays an even more central role, however; that is, the Buddha's physical presence serves to establish a “holy land” or *buddhadesa*. This motif occurs consistently in

Southeast Asian Theravada chronicles in the form of the Buddha's miraculous visits to these regions.

Both the *Dīpavaṃsa* (Island Chronicle) and the *Mahāvāṃsa* (Great Chronicle) begin with an account of the Blessed One's three visits to Sri Lanka during the first eight years after his enlightenment. The Island Chronicle states in its opening line: "Listen to me. I shall relate the chronicle of the *Buddha's coming to the island*." The same construction appears in Burmese, Thai, and Laotian chronicles. For example, the oldest extant Burmese chronicle, *The Celebrated Chronicle*, written by Samantapasadika Silvavamsa in the fifteenth century follows the typical Theravada chronicle pattern that moves from a discussion of the kings of Buddhist India, to the Buddhist conquest of Sri Lanka, and then to the Buddha's visit to Lekaing village in the Tagaung kingdom of Burma, a story repeated in the famous *Glass Palace Chronicle* commissioned by King Bagyidaw in 1829 C.E.

In the legend, two brothers, Mahapon and Sulapon, request that the Buddha visit their country, where they built a sandalwood monastery for him: "the Lord foreseeing that in time to come his religion would be established for a long time in Burma, came many times with . . . five hundred saints until the monastery was finished. And when it was finished he gathered alms for seven days, enjoyed the bliss of mystic meditation, and refreshed the people with the ambrosia of his teaching (*dhamma*)."<sup>76</sup>

The legend continues with the conversion of five hundred men and five hundred women to the Buddha's teaching and their attainment of sainthood (*arahant*). By tracing the origin of the establishment of Buddhism in Burma to the Buddha himself, the chronicler legitimates the tradition and imbues it with an absolute authority beyond the merely historical. As the *Celebrated Chronicle* contends, "in Sri Lanka the religion did not begin to arise before the year C.E. 236 [the date of the conversion of King Devanampiyatissa by Mahinda, King Asoka's son]. But in our land the religion that arose since the time the Lord came to dwell in the sandalwood monastery."<sup>77</sup>

The Thai Buddhist chronicles tell a similar story with miraculous elaborations added. In the *Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror*, the Buddha takes his bowl and robe and flies from Varanasi to Haripuñjaya in

northern Thailand, where he preaches the dhamma and instructs the people in the three refuges and the five moral precepts.<sup>78</sup> In the chronicle, *Phrachao Liap Lok* (The Buddha Travels the World), the Buddha's visit initiates the establishment of towns and monasteries, constituting a kind of sacred geography. Virtually all the chronicles of major northern Thai monasteries begin with a founding visit by the Buddha.

Political units also develop around the material representations of the Buddha, namely, his relics and his image. For example, when the Buddha makes his legendary visit to northern Thailand, he predicts that one of his relics will be discovered by King Adittaraja of Haripuñjaya.<sup>79</sup> This discovery coincides with the growth of the kingdom of Haripuñjaya and is evidence of royal patronage of Theravada Buddhism that abetted integration of the expanding kingdom.

The Buddha relic symbolizes political authority in two ways. First, when enshrined in a *cetiya* or reliquary mound, the relic functions as a magical center or *axis mundi* for the kingdom. The enshrined relic becomes the symbol par excellence of the monarch as *cakkavattin* or "wheel turner." Literally, the king becomes the "hub" of a cosmosized state. Second, from a historical perspective, the enshrinement of a relic usually entails legitimation of the monarch by the monastic order. Thus, King Aniruddha of Pagan justifies his conquest of Pegu in the Mon kingdom of Lower Burma by expropriating the Mon sangha and by building great monuments. Aniruddha's religious edifices symbolize his power as world ruler. Royal patronage of the monastic order serves to guarantee popular support.

Buddha images also function as symbols of political authority, linking the person of the monarch with the Buddha. A brief look at the Emerald Buddha image, the palladium of the Chakri Dynasty in Thailand, will illustrate the power of the Buddha as cosmocrator.

The story of the origin of the Emerald Buddha image or the Holy Emerald Jewel is told in the northern Thai chronicles as follows:

Some 500 years after the death of the Buddha the holy monk, Nagasena, counselor to King Milinda (or Menander), wanted to make an image of the

Buddha to propagate the faith. Fearing that an image of gold or silver would be destroyed, he decides to make one from a precious stone endowed with special power. Sakka (i.e., Indra), becoming aware of this wish, goes to Mt. Vibul to obtain a suitable gem from the great *cakkavatti* king or Universal Monarch who has in his possession seven precious stones with supernatural powers. Since only a *cakkavatti* king can possess such a gem, the guardians of Mt. Vibul offer an Emerald Jewel which is of the same essence and comes from the same place as the gem requested by Sakka. The god takes the Emerald Jewel to Nagasena. Vissukamma, the divine craftsman, then appears in the guise of an artisan and fashions the Jewel into a Buddha image. When it is completed, the holy monk invites the seven relics of the Buddha to enter into it. Finally, he predicts that the image will be worshipped in Cambodia, Burma, and Siam.<sup>80</sup>

The chronicles then proceed to narrate the travels of the image from India to Sri Lanka, Angkor, and various Siamese principalities and northern city-states. The Emerald Buddha emerges onto the pages of history in the fifteenth century during the reign of Tilokaraja of Chiang Mai. In the mid-sixteenth century the image is taken to Laos where it remained until 1778 when it was brought to Bangkok. Today it resides in the chapel of the Grand Palace where it is venerated as the protector of the Chakri Dynasty.

The Emerald Buddha image possesses a power inherent in the precious stone itself, but its supernatural character is enhanced by its association with such cult objects as the *Indra-kila*, the guardian deity of the capital city of Chiang Mai, and moreover, its identification with the *cakkavattin* king or the Buddha in his *cakkavattin* aspect. Possession of the Emerald Buddha image endows a monarch with special power and authority:

Through the proper veneration of the Jewel the king gains the support of sovereign power in its most potent and beneficent form. And, on a deeper level, the king's meditation on the Jewel imbues him with that power and thereby enables him to exercise authority to establish order, and to guarantee the protection for the kingdom. Moreover, it was this identification between

the Jewel and the Buddha-Cakkavatti which provided the ultimate justification for one of the most important functions associated with the Jewel in the Thai and Laotian kingdoms where it was venerated—namely, its role as the sovereign ruler before whom the various princes of the kingdom swore their fealty to the reigning monarch who possessed it.<sup>81</sup>

The relationship between the person of the Buddha and political authority has many fascinating symbolic and historical dimensions. A central theme that emerges from the traditional Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhist chronicles, however, is the power of the Buddha as cosmocrator. The Buddha sacralizes the land through his *physical* presence, his actual visitations, and signs of his physical presence in relics, footprints, and images. However, the presence of the Buddha is only latent or potential. A royal monarch is the only person with sufficient power to actualize the Buddha's presence in the mundane world by the enshrinement of Buddha relics, as in the case of King Adittaraja. Historically, relations between the Buddhist sangha and Buddhist rulers could be and often were contentious; however, the Buddha's dhamma perpetuated by the sangha requires a righteous political ruler (*dhammaraja*) with the power and authority to order an otherwise fractious society.<sup>82</sup> Despite the dynamic tension that pertains between the ascetical ideals of the Buddha and the world-ordering duties and responsibilities of the king, the two are complementary: the mundane (*lokiya*) and the transmundane (*lokuttara*); the princely and the ascetic; power and compassion.

## MODERN NATIONALISM AND BUDDHISM

Traditional religion has played a crucial role in the recent histories of many countries in the so-called developing world. Islamic resurgence in the Middle East and other parts of the world including Southeast Asia is a dramatic example. In the post-World War II period, Mohandas K. Gandhi capitalized on the rich reservoir of Indian religious-cultural values in the service of Indian independence. In significant ways, Buddhism figured importantly in

nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist sentiments and movements in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Buddhism has also become a factor in the national rebuilding process in Laos and Cambodia in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

Given the close identification between Buddhism and the traditional states in colonially dominated countries, particularly Burma and Sri Lanka, it is not surprising to discover that Buddhism was both directly and indirectly involved in enhancing nationalistic political sentiment and contributing to new forms of national integration under indigenous leadership. U Nu of Burma and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka provide the most striking examples of political leaders in the immediate postcolonial period, becoming the modern representatives of the Buddhist tradition of the “ruler of dhamma” (*dhammika dhammaraja*). More recently, the militarily controlled government of Myanmar established by General Ne Win in 1963 sought to legitimate its autocratic, repressive policies after 1980 through selective support of the Buddhist sangha; however, underlying tensions between the military junta and the sangha erupted in violence that led to violent repression in 1989 and 2007. Various forms of Buddhist civic religion have also figured prominently in Thailand’s rapid economic development over the past several decades. We shall study the relationship between modern nationalism and Theravada Buddhism as it emerged in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.

### Myanmar (Burma)

In January 1948, U Nu became the first prime minister of the newly independent Union of Burma. He espoused a political ideology that blended Buddhism and socialism. In essence, it was based on the theory that a national community could be built only if the individual members were able to overcome their own selfish interests. U Nu argued that material goods were not meant to be saved or used for personal comfort but only to provide for the necessities of life in the journey to nibbana.<sup>83</sup> He contended that property



and class distinctions should be transcended in the spirit of Buddhist self-abnegation for the good of the larger community. Not unlike the dhamma of Asoka, U Nu espoused an ideology of a welfare state rooted in a *cakkavattin's* superior knowledge about the causality of deliverance from suffering directed toward the humanitarian ideal of the benefit of all sentient beings. He preached a socialistic doctrine of a classless society without want in which all members would strive for moral and mental perfection to overcome the constant rounds of rebirth.<sup>84</sup>

U Nu's political ideology blended Buddhism with socialism. Moreover, his personal lifestyle embodied elements of the traditional ideal of the righteous Buddhist monarch. Approximately six months after taking office an insurrection nearly toppled the government. His response to that threat was to take a vow of sexual abstinence so that by the power of his personal example the insurgents would be defeated: "On July 20, 1948, when the insurrection was causing anxiety, I went into my prayer room and before the Holy Image took the vow of absolute purity, making a wish at that time that if I kept that vow the insurgents would be confounded."<sup>85</sup>

In 1950, U Nu created a Buddhist Sasana Council whose purpose was to propagate Buddhism and supervise monks. He appointed a minister of religious affairs and ordered government departments to dismiss civil servants thirty minutes early so that they could meditate. In the manner of King Asoka and later Southeast Asian Buddhist monarchs, he called a sangha council to purify the dhamma and produce a new redaction of the Pali canon. For that council he constructed a large stupa and assembly hall at the cost of six million U.S. dollars in emulation of the meritorious acts of earlier kings on behalf of the Buddhist sangha. U Nu's overthrow in 1962 at the hands of General Ne Win was partially justified on the grounds of U Nu's insistence that Buddhism be the basis for national identity.

In August 1961, U Nu introduced an amendment in the Burmese Parliament to establish Buddhism as the state religion. Because Myanmar contains sizable non-Buddhist and non-Burmese minorities, such as the Shan, Karen, Mon, and Chin, these groups resisted his policies. Donald E. Smith suggests that U Nu escaped from the hard requirements of political leadership



*Figure 2.11. Aung San Suu Kyi. Sketch by Sayun, Chiang Mai.*

through his many religious activities, and that his continual preoccupation with religious matters deprived him of a rational approach to political, economic, and social problems.<sup>86</sup> Despite these criticisms, U Nu still can be regarded as a modern approximation of the traditional Theravada Buddhist ideal of the righteous monarch.

U Nu's successor, General Ne Win, proposed to create a secular, socialist state in which Buddhist institutions within the state's superstructure would be dismantled.<sup>87</sup> The Buddhist Sasana Council was dissolved, and the Burmese Socialist Program called for the freedom of religion. In the face of mounting economic and political problems, however, the secular direction of the Ne Win government shifted in the closing years of the 1970s as the government sought to shore up its legitimacy through the unification and purification of the sangha. In this policy of active engagement with Buddhist civic religion, Myanmar's military government, which in 1997 changed its

name from the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has attempted to control Buddhism in a manner far more encompassing and systematically repressive than that of U Nu.

The ruling junta has changed its relations with the international community as well, relaxing Ne Win's policy of isolationist socialism in favor of allowing foreign investment from the few countries that do not participate in a boycott of the regime, notably China, India, Thailand, and Singapore. Beyond the military elite, however, the majority of the country's citizens, Burmese and minorities alike, remain impoverished. The country's industrial development has been stifled, Burma's agricultural production has declined, and the country's transportation and communications infrastructure has deteriorated. Furthermore, basic freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press have been greatly restricted. The military refused to honor their overwhelming electoral defeat in the 1990 elections, killing or jailing many opposition leaders, including Buddhist monks who had joined in the protest. Since the 1990 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the major opposition party and the winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, has spent most of her time under house arrest.<sup>88</sup>

In 1980 the government restructured the sangha in an effort to exercise greater control and to secure the support of senior monastic leaders. In April of that year, more than a thousand sangha representatives from each township attended a national assembly in Yangon. Many national, regional, and local monastic organizations were created; numerous regulations were passed to enforce both monastic discipline and state control of the monastic order, including issuance of identification papers "to provide for the scrutiny of individuals entering the monkhood and to systematically control and supervise members after their admission into the monkhood."<sup>89</sup> The state sponsored countrywide lecture tours by renowned religious teachers, and the government has promoted missions to propagate Buddhism among non-Buddhist populations in the six states and divisions of the country.

On the symbolic level, Ne Win ordered the construction of the Mahavi-jaya Pagoda in Yangon in 1980 as a meritorious act following the death of



Figure 2.12. Mahavijaya cetiya.  
Yangon, Myanmar.

his mother. The monument virtually abuts and is a replica of the Shwedagon Pagoda, Burma's most venerated pilgrimage center and one of the holiest sites in Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia. Several articles about the pagoda that appeared in *The Light of the Dhamma*, a journal published by the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs, promote the Mahavijaya *cetiya* as a national symbol of unity and peace.

The Burmese government's symbolic and practical promotion of Buddhism is reminiscent of classical as well as modern forms of Buddhist civic religion, in which religion and the state are inexorably linked. A 1981 article in *The Light of the Dhamma* likens the relationship between Buddhism, the people, and the state to three strands of a single rope:



*Figure 2.13. Myanmar monks demonstrating against government policies in 2007.*

Both the worldly affairs of the people and the governmental affairs of the State are mundane aspects. In the performance and execution of these mundane meaningful hope for the happiness in the life hereafter. All these supramundane issues are collectively known as “Religious Affairs.”

To carry out, supervise, and patronize all these religious affairs, the full-fledged clergy members of the Monastic Order (Sangha) are entirely responsible.

As a matter of fact, the fully-fledged cleric members of the Sangha Order and the officials of the government are the products born of the nation. Therefore, they have to render their services for the welfare and happiness of all the people. As such, the working people, the government and the members of the Order (in other words, the People, the State and the Church) must be in harmony and conformity with one another in the establishment of the blissful and meaningful living world. Indeed, they are like three strings twisted properly into one strong durable rope.<sup>90</sup>

In the case of Myanmar, the attempts to promote a contemporary Buddhist civic religion serve to support a repressive military regime—a far cry from the idealized portrayals of Buddhist *dhammarajas*, such as Devanampiyatissa, Tilokaraj, and Kyanzittha, or U Nu’s benevolent Buddhist socialism. Despite efforts on the part of the military junta to garner the support of the Buddhist sangha, tensions remain between the monastic order and the government. These tensions boiled over in August and September of 2007, when monks led anti-regime demonstrations in Yangon and other cities in what has been called the “saffron revolution.” According to news reports, over ten thousand monks led marches in Yangon, not only protesting economic hardships caused by inflated fuel prices, but also demanding support for democratic reforms and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. On September 24, spontaneous demonstrations erupted in twenty-five cities across the country that led to a harsh government crackdown on Buddhist monasteries. Monasteries were raided and hundreds of monks were arrested. Anticipating more demonstrations at the end of the Rains Retreat in October, the military cordoned off the Shwedagon and Sule Pagodas in Yangon. A hundred monks in Pakokku, 370 miles northwest of Yangon, braved military reprisals, and returned to the streets demanding lower commodity prices and the release of political prisoners.<sup>91</sup>

## Sri Lanka

S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, elected prime minister of Ceylon in 1956, is another notable example of the symbiotic relationship between Theravada Buddhism and a political state in the immediate postcolonial period. Like U Nu, Bandaranaike exploited the symbols and institutional power of Buddhism to come into office: “a prominent feature of the movement led by Bandaranaike consisted in the large-scale participation of Buddhist monks in the political struggle, and there can little doubt that approval by the sangha was a major factor in legitimizing the political actions taken by him in terms of the living Buddhist tradition of Ceylon.”<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, these same forces,

when identified with Sinhala ethnicity and a call by a monastic political party (Eksat Bhikkhu Peramuna) to make Sinhala the national language, provoked severe communal animosities that eventually led to Bandaranaike's assassination in 1962, an act engineered by a disgruntled Buddhist monk. Despite this disastrous consequence, since 1956 nationalistic sentiments grounded in Sinhala ethnicity and language and the Buddhist religion have continued to dominate Sri Lanka's politics.<sup>93</sup> In contrast to Myanmar, where the progressive voices of the sangha who support the democratic policies of Aung San Suu Kyi were repressed by an authoritarian military government, in Sri Lanka, the most politically active monks in 2004 formed the Sinhala National Heritage Party (JHU) to promote a chauvinistic Buddhist agenda.

Like U Nu, Bandaranaike espoused an ideology, which he characterized as Buddhist socialism. In a speech before the World Fellowship of Buddhists in 1950, he enunciated a political philosophy that blended western socialist political theory with a general appeal to Buddhist ideals: "I believe in democracy because I believe in the Buddhist doctrine that a man's worth should be measured by his own merit and not some extraneous circumstance and also that human freedom is a priceless possession. The Buddha preached that ultimate freedom of man when the human mind need not be subject even to the will of God, and man was free to decide for himself what was right or wrong. . . . In economics I consider myself a Socialist, for I cannot reconcile, with the spirit of the doctrine of Maitreya, man-made inequalities that condemn a large section of our fellowmen to poverty, ignorance and disease."<sup>94</sup>

Although Bandaranaike's lifestyle did not personify the righteous Buddhist monarch ideal in the same way as U Nu, he justified his democratic political beliefs and socialistic economic philosophy with an appeal to the Buddhist "Middle Way" that was neutralist in international policy and uniquely Sinhalese in national policy. In the eyes of many Sinhalese Buddhists, Bandaranaike is considered a national hero along with the Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933)<sup>95</sup> as one of the two great leaders in the modern period who, like the ancient kings Dutthagamani (r. 161–137 B.C.E.) and Parakrama Bahu I (r. 1153–1186 C.E.), sought to establish the preeminence of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. His espousal of a Buddhist civic religion, how-



ever, contributed to a Sinhalese Buddhist chauvinism that exacerbated the communal conflict between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority populations on the island. In 1983 this conflict erupted into a still unresolved fratricidal conflict.

Apologists for Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism cite the *Mahāvamsa*, a fifth-century Buddhist Pali chronicle, as evidence that the conflict between the Sinhalese Buddhists and Hindu Tamils has ancient roots. However, postcolonial critics argue that the equation of nation = Sinhala = Buddhist stems from the late nineteenth century “when the issues of ethnicity, religion, and territory began to take centre stage in the political drama of the island.”<sup>96</sup> Basing his rhetoric on the *Mahāvamsa*, Dharmapala played a key role in formulating an ideology of Buddhist nationalism that trumped any group threatening the hegemony of Sinhalese Buddhism, specifically, British colonial authority, and the Hindu Tamils. In effect, the *Mahāvamsa* becomes the “Bible” for Sinhala Buddhist nationalists. The legendary visits of the Buddha to the island recorded in the chronicle are interpreted as consecrating a promised land exclusively for Sinhala Buddhists, and King Dutthagamani, who killed King Elara, a Hindu Tamil who ruled much of the island in the first century C.E., is lionized as a national hero. The island of Sri Lanka is imagined as the place of the Sinhala (*sinhaladipa*) and the religion of the Buddha (*dhammadipa*).

Instrumental historical causes of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict stem from three centuries of Dutch and British economic exploitation that disrupted the island’s traditional way of life by challenging the ancient cultural synthesis fostered through royal and religious institutions, especially the Buddhist monastery. More recent developments that have contributed to the conflict include: the nationalistic Buddhist ideology of Anagarika Dharmapala; the Buddhist civic religion promoted by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike; and the economic policies of J. R. Jayawardena, prime minister from 1977 to 1989, that created an increasing disparity between urban wealth and rural poverty.<sup>97</sup> Chauvinistic nationalism was further exacerbated by the militant policies of Jayawardena’s successor, Ranasingha Premadasa, who was assassinated in the spring of 1993.<sup>98</sup> Premadasa sought to undermine the work of A. T. Ari-



ariyaratne's Sarvodaya Shramadana movement which promotes a progressive, inclusive, socially engaged Buddhism inspired by Gandhian ideals of social uplift (see part 3). From its founding in 1958, Sarvodaya has worked in over ten thousand villages throughout the island for the well-being of all people, regardless of religion, class, or ethnicity. The movement also has sponsored numerous peace walks since 1983, the year that marked the beginning of organized violence between the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam).

Sarvodaya is the most important national Buddhist group seeking reconciliation between the government and the LTTE. In January 1994, Ariyaratne visited Jaffna, the stronghold of the Tamil Eelam, in an effort to mediate between the Sinhalese dominated national government and the Tamil separatists. The major international effort to broker a settlement between the two sides led by Norway resulted in a fragile peace agreement in 2002 (the Oslo Agreement). The agreement collapsed in April 2003, with the Sinhalese fearing that too much central authority would be surrendered, and the Tamils fearing that they had insufficient autonomy. The election of Mahinda Rajapakse as president in November 2005 has done little to alter the stalemate. International efforts to resume peace talks competing with increasing communal violence have left the fundamental issues dividing the warring parties unresolved.

Historical distance undoubtedly has idealized the Asokan *dhammaraja* paradigm of justice and compassion and given traditional Buddhist kingship a more benevolent cast than warranted; however, the use of Buddhism to legitimate communal violence flies in the face of the time-honored Buddhist principles of peace, nonkilling, nonviolence, and the ideal of the righteous ruler. It is to these traditions that peace activists, such as A. T. Ariyaratne, appeal in their efforts to heal the wounds of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict.

## Thailand

Unlike Myanmar and Sri Lanka, Thailand never came under Western colonial rule. Buddhism in Thailand, then, has played a somewhat different role in defining and legitimating national identity in the modern period.<sup>99</sup> Under the leadership of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910), the Buddhist sangha was organized along national lines and governed by a Supreme Patriarch (*sangha-raja*).<sup>100</sup> Via the network of Buddhist monasteries throughout the country, Rama V promoted the first program of national education. Monastic education itself was regularized under the control of the national government. Under Rama V's successor, King Vajiravudh (r. 1910–1925), religion and government became increasingly integrated. Vajiravudh blended the concepts of “nation,” “religion,” and “king” into a governing ideology for modern Thailand. He promoted a civic religion in which “nation” competed with “religion” and the “monarchy” as marks of Thai identity, a process that has increasingly accelerated. Since that time, shifts in the government have led to revisions in the legal code governing the monastic order, first in 1941 and again in 1962, but the integration of the bhikkhu sangha into a national, bureaucratic system under the control of the central government has not changed. Since 1962 the legal structure of the sangha has tended to support a hierarchical, status quo-oriented, civic religion.

From time to time controversial monks, such as Khruha Sivichai in Chiang Mai in the 1930s or Phra Phimontham in Bangkok in the 1950s, have threatened the compliant cooperation between the sangha and the government, but the hand-in-glove mutuality between religious and political orders has never been significantly challenged. The Buddhist religion (*sasana*) has enjoyed the material support of powerful government, military, and economic elites; in turn, the sangha has rendered assistance to various national development schemes. Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, who exploited the symbolism of the monarchy and Buddhism to legitimate his 1957 coup d'état, promoted national integration through the creation of the Thamathut and the Thammacharik Programs under the control of government ministries and bureaus. In the 1960s and 1970s, one of the main aims of the



*Figure 2.14. A Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) restaurant shrine. Chiang Rai, Thailand.*

Thammathut Program was to promote rural development in areas of the country threatened by political unrest. The Thammacharik Program sends monks to work among the animistic hill tribe peoples of northern Thailand. Propagating Buddhism among non-Thai peoples with limited loyalty to the national government has been one of the principal means of their integration into the Thai nation-state.<sup>101</sup>

One of the striking developments in Thailand in the early 1990s has been the emergence of a cult of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), the Thai monarch principally responsible for overseeing the changes that challenged Thailand at the end of the nineteenth century. It is common to see a bronze image or picture of Rama V on a restaurant altar shelf; Rama V's equestrian statue in front of the parliament building in Bangkok has become a shrine visited daily by thousands of people; and there are shops in new shopping malls devoted exclusively to Rama V memorabilia.<sup>102</sup> One is tempted to interpret

this phenomenon in *devaraja* terms. It is legitimate to ask whether Rama v has, indeed, become a type of modernized divine apotheosis. The social, economic, and political reasons for this apparent apotheosis are quite complex; they reflect the reactions of the populace caught in the rapid economic and social change in the country, increasing affluence accompanied by the frustration of the expectations of an expanding educated, urban, professional class, and I would argue, the general decline of Buddhism as a determinant of cultural and social values. From a political perspective, it has been suggested that the cult of Rama v is a carefully orchestrated campaign to enhance the image of the monarchy, increasingly criticized by Thai intellectuals. However, the emergence of the cult may simply reflect a nostalgic yearning for the early days of the twentieth century when—as popular belief has it—the monarchy was strong, the country prosperous, and traditional values informed the progress of modernization.

The veneration of Rama v dominates but does not encompass the cult of Thai kingship that includes other kings in the Chakri lineage, especially, Rama IX,<sup>103</sup> the current monarch, and also the founder-rulers of the early city-states of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Sukhothai. The prolonged celebrations and unusually wide range of activities, including the production of Rama IX memorabilia honoring the sixtieth anniversary of Rama IX's accession to the throne in 2006, resonates with the cult of Rama v as a symbolic underpinning of an imagined Thai identity. From a political perspective, moreover, the unusual degree of public adulation given the king served to counterbalance the political turmoil surrounding Thaksin Shinawatra, the controversial prime minister, popular among the rural poor in the northeast and north, but whose policies greatly exacerbated regional, economic, and social disparities.

On September 19, 2006, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the army commander-in-chief and a group of military leaders organized as the Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy (CDRM), removed Thaksin from power in a coup d'état and took over the reins of government, declaring that a civilian government would be put in place and new elections would be held in October, 2007, following the draft of a new constitution. General Sonthi and a council of military leaders justified their actions on

the grounds of purifying a corrupt government administration, maintaining peace and harmony, preserving democracy and, above all, stressing loyalty to and protection of the king who gave his blessing to the coup. The CDRM, in essence, legitimated their actions on the grounds that it was acting on behalf of Rama IX, the embodiment of the righteous Buddhist monarch, and in support of democracy. In the light of social and economic divisions in the Thai body politic in the aftermath following the political victory of the People's Power Party (PPP) in the election in December, 2007, King Bhumibol Adulyadej appealed for unity, urging the Thai people to put national stability above personal, vested interests and refrain from creating conditions that might exacerbate social divisions.

## Cambodia and Laos

As in the case of Sri Lanka and Myanmar, Buddhism played a central political role in promoting a nationalist agenda in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Cambodia and Laos were under French colonial rule. But unlike Sri Lanka and Myanmar, under communist regimes during the second half of the twentieth century, the sanghas in both countries experienced repression and severe hardship. In Cambodia, "with the possible exception of Mongolia . . . no form of Buddhism has come so close to total extinction."<sup>104</sup> The reversal of the sangha's fortunes in both countries was due to the place of Buddhism in the Khmer and Lao imagination and its identification with traditional polities: first, Buddhism contributed to nationalist sentiments against the French; then, it was displaced or eradicated by communist regimes; and currently Buddhism is being resuscitated as part of a twenty-first century nation-building process in both countries.

In the case of Cambodia, under French colonial rule, the Khmer monarchs, Norodom (r. 1864–1904) and Sisowat (r. 1904–1927), patronized the sangha much as the kings of old. Norodom had rest houses constructed along principal roads in imitation of Asoka and Jayavarman VII; he cast an image of the future Buddha Metteyya that corresponded to his own bodily

proportions; and his half-brother, Sisowat, was a particularly pious supporter of the Thommayut sect founded in Thailand by King Rama IV.<sup>105</sup> After the Geneva Convention established Cambodia's independence in 1954, Norodom Sihanouk became the head of state espousing an ideology of Buddhist socialism similar to that of Bandaranaike and U Nu: "We are socialists but our socialism is inspired far more by Buddhist morality and the religious traditions of our national existence than by doctrines imported from abroad."<sup>106</sup>

However, of greater consequence for the political future of Cambodia was the contribution to Khmer nationalism made by the modernist movement within Khmer Buddhism that encouraged an imagined sense of a Khmer community sharing a common print culture.<sup>107</sup> Particularly important in this enterprise were scholar-monks such as the Venerable Choun Nath (1883–1969) of the modernist group within the Mahanikay known as the Thommakay. In 1930 he became the director of the *École Supérieure de Pali*. The Buddhist Institute established in Phnom Penh during the same year proved to be an especially important "breeding ground for anticolonialist sentiments."<sup>108</sup> Son Ngoc Thanh, the first secretary, was a key figure in the nationalist movement, and former scholar-monks appointed to the Institute, Son Ngoc Minh (Mean) and Tou Samouth (Sok), helped found the communist party that came to power in 1979. Nearly thirty years earlier, at the first meeting of the Khmer Independence Association in 1950 under the aegis of the Viet Minh, over half of the two hundred in attendance were said to have been Buddhist monks.

The Khmer Rouge, fueled by a radical antireligious ideology, eventually sought to eliminate the Buddhist sangha. At first, however, Pol Pot (Saloth Sar) "visualized a reconstituted Cambodia in which a democratic regime will bring back Buddhist moral[ity] because our great leader Buddha was the first to have taught democracy."<sup>109</sup> Later, as Henri Locard points out, when the Khmer Rouge came to power, Buddhism was subverted to the ends of a brutal, totalitarian state: the KR substituted the revolution for enlightenment, Angkar for the Buddha, and the righteous Buddhist king was personified by Pol Pot.<sup>110</sup>

The Khmer Rouge regime relentlessly pursued the systematic destruction of Buddhism from Cambodian society. Between 1970 and 1973, nearly a third of the country's 3,369 monasteries were destroyed, although many may have fallen casualty to the raging civil war or American bombs, not solely due to the intentional destruction by the Khmer Rouge.<sup>111</sup> Several months after the Khmer Rouge victory on April 17, 1975, the persecution of Buddhism began in earnest. By the end of the year, nearly all of the remaining monasteries were closed, and by 1979 perhaps fewer than a hundred monks remained in robes with most of them fleeing in exile to Vietnam. The death of hundreds of thousands of Cambodians and the wanton destruction of Khmer cultural and social institutions has been characterized as the moral inversion of Buddhism, a world "in which evil and good were fused in the Angkar and cadres were both subhuman beings with immense magical powers and morally superior beings equivalent to Buddhist monks. Organized Buddhism had to be eliminated for this new order to be established."<sup>112</sup>

After the defeat of the Khmer Rouge by the Vietnamese in 1979 and the establishment of the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea, the Buddhist sangha began its slow, halting recovery with the number of ordained monks and novices growing significantly after 1988. In April 1989, the National Assembly of the PRK amended the constitution to make Buddhism once again the national religion of Cambodia. Since the UN brokered settlement in 1991 between the PRK and three competing Cambodian factions, the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces, and the first elections in May of 1993, the condition of Khmer Buddhism continued to improve.<sup>113</sup>

At the state level, the Ministry of Religion and Cults was reestablished with the purpose of reorganizing the pre-1970 ecclesiastical structures, developing a plan for monastic education, reestablishing the Buddhist Institute, and engaging in the task of recovering and reconstructing the legacy of Buddhist literature lost or destroyed. As a result, Buddhism has once again resumed a central role in Cambodian social and political life. Politicians seek the blessing of high-ranking monks, much as they do in Thailand. Monks are invited to chant at large public gatherings, and customary religious practices have resumed their place in community life.

Cambodian Buddhism's survival, despite its near total extinction in the 1970s, is a testimony to its resilience and adaptability: "The visible presence of the *sangha* and its unique significance as the only institution able to operate effectively and with high levels of mass support through the whole of the country have ensured that almost all governments have felt the need to cultivate the Buddhist sector, whatever their political philosophy. There is little reason to assume that this situation will change in the near future."<sup>114</sup>

To a similar but somewhat lesser degree, Buddhism in Laos parallels the role played by Khmer Buddhists in the development of anticolonial, nationalist sentiment. This came about, in part, by a revival of the fortunes of Buddhism in the 1920s and 1930s through French intervention and support that included the reconstruction of That Luang, the most important royal *chedi* in the country, the restoration of Wat Phra Kaeo (the Temple of the Emerald Buddha), the improvement of monastic education, the founding of a College of Pali in Vientiane, and the establishment of the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh, which attracted Lao scholars and encouraged the rediscovery and preservation of Lao history and culture.<sup>115</sup>

The 1947 constitution declared Buddhism to be the state religion, the king its protector, and created a Ministry of Religion and Cults to oversee religious affairs and a ritual calendar organized around religious and royal state festivals.<sup>116</sup> The *sangha* was essentially used as an instrument of state policy, first by the Pathet Lao who controlled the Ministry of Religious Affairs from 1957 to 1959, and subsequently by the right-wing Royal Lao Government supported by the United States.

By the 1960s and early 1970s, the *sangha* had become increasingly politicized. The Royal Lao regime, with American support, trained monks in community development programs similar to the Thammacarik initiative in Thailand to counter communist influence. The Pathet Lao, for their part, organized the National Association of Lao Buddhists under the Lao Patriotic Front (LPF) aimed at denouncing American intervention. In 1968, the LPF Congress adopted a political program that called on the *sangha* to unite against U.S. imperialists and their henchmen "for forcing monks to support 'criminal schemes,' destroying pagodas to preach decadent American culture,



and sowing discord among Buddhists.”<sup>117</sup> After the formation of the Third Coalition government in 1973, the sangha came increasingly under government control. It was restructured as the Lao United Buddhist Association overseen by the Pathet Lao Party. Young monks were encouraged to disrobe or to earn their own livelihood, and the fortnightly recitation of the *patimokkha* degenerated into communist self-criticism sessions.<sup>118</sup>

Although the socialist regime in Laos never sought to destroy the Buddhist sangha per se as occurred in Cambodia, the victory of a radically secular political regime in December 1975 forced “the king to step down and with him went the centrality of Buddhism. Modern nationalism’s triumvirate of monarchy-religion-nation were swallowed up by the singular communist party state.”<sup>119</sup> The government placed severe restrictions on the monastic order: it limited the freedom to enter the monkhood; and it controlled the content of the monastic curriculum and a wide range of traditional monastic practices. The sangha, in effect, became an extension of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party. Furthermore, in a material sense, the sangha suffered from an economy greatly weakened by the effects of the Vietnam War and the economic policies of a socialist government. With the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and the adoption of a policy of greater economic liberalization, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic has replaced its former revolutionary justification for its policies with the ideology of nationalism. Close government control of a wide range of religious rituals has been eased and there has been a “re-Buddhification of the Lao state.”<sup>120</sup> However, as Martin Stuart-Fox observes, “It is in this context that Buddhism is experiencing a resurgence in popularity . . . [but] Whether or not its social influence will permit the Order to regain a degree of institutional independence . . . remains to be seen.”<sup>121</sup>

In part 2 we have studied some of the ways in which political authority and power in Southeast Asia are grounded in or related to Buddhism and its institutions. We found that the centrality of the person of the Buddha in the rituals, rites, and festivals studied in part 1 emerged within the context of the classical Southeast Asian states in the form of the Buddha as cos-

mocrator. We have seen how sacred history came into play in the context of traditional Southeast Asian monarchies in the form of the exemplary, righteous Buddhist rulers (*dhammaraja*). We examined the relationship between religion and the state, kingship and cosmology within the context of classical Southeast Asian states and monuments dating from the tenth through the fifteenth centuries.

This interpretation of classical Southeast Asian monarchical states is informed by the notion of mimesis, namely, that Southeast Asian rulers and their states were empowered by the imitation of the paradigmatic Buddhist world ruler on the one hand, and the cosmology of the Indian worldview on the other. Subsequently, we analyzed the proposition that in the modern period leaders of independence movements in Myanmar and Sri Lanka consciously sought to legitimate their new nations in the face of Western colonialism through the symbols and ideology of Theravada Buddhism; and, furthermore, that in the contemporary nation-states of Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, on both symbolic and institutional levels, Buddhism continues to figure prominently in government policies, programs, and strategies. Finally, the fortunes of the Buddhist sangha and the political and social importance of Buddhism as a lived tradition have brightened during the slow and painful process of national renewal in Laos and Cambodia, countries devastated both economically and politically by the Vietnam War and its aftermath. In sum, we have explored the varied and diverse place of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia in the dynamic processes of the construction of political states and the very imagining of community.

### PART III

## BUDDHISM AND MODERNIZATION

Religious traditions are constantly evolving and responding to social, economic, and political change. Far from being static, they contribute to such change. They challenge foreign ideologies and in that engagement are influenced by them. In stable periods of history, religious traditions seem to change only imperceptibly, but in more volatile times, the disruption and transformation of religious institutions and worldviews keeps pace with and sometimes outstrips changes in other areas of life. Since the end of World War II, Southeast Asia has experienced rapid changes abetted by war, political revolution, the demise of colonially shaped governments, the impact of the world market economy, and the erosion of many traditional institutions and cultural practices.<sup>1</sup>

Cambodia is an extreme case in point. Under Pol Pot's reign of terror, the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) sought to remove virtually all vestiges of its colonial past and traditional heritage, including Buddhism. Between 1975 and 1979, the CPK "wanted to exercise absolute control and hoped to preside over the destruction of Cambodia's past."<sup>2</sup> In four years, over a million Cambodians were killed and over half a million fled the country. The population of Phnom Penh, the capital, was forced to evacuate the city within twenty-four hours. The country witnessed the wholesale destruction of monasteries and temples. Buddhist monks were either killed or forced to disrobe and return to lay life. The consequences for religious institutions were disastrous. It appeared that Theravada Buddhism as an institution had been effectively eliminated, surviving only in remnant fashion in refugee camps along the Thai border or among refugee communities in North America and

Western Europe. However, when the Vietnamese established the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in 1979, the fortunes of Buddhism slightly improved. The creation of a new coalition government in 1992 brought hope for a restored Cambodian Buddhist sangha, and in 1993 Norodom Sihanouk was reestablished as king of Cambodia, a position closely associated with Buddhism.

In Laos, the Pathet Lao, which came to power in 1975, restricted and regulated the Buddhist sangha. Unlike the Pol Pot regime, the Laotian government did not seek to destroy Buddhism. However, monastic education suffered reversals, monastic recruitment declined, and the primacy of Buddhism for Laotian national identity was challenged and undermined by the socialist government supported by the Soviet Union. Yet, despite these setbacks, Buddhism continues to be important in Laotian social and cultural life, and today thrives among expatriate Laotian communities in North America and Europe as well. By 1994 the material fortunes of the Lao sangha began to benefit from the rebounding Lao economy and financial support of expatriates abroad, although the sangha is still under the tight control of the Lao socialist government.

Contemporary challenges to traditional Theravada Buddhism have not been as dramatic in Myanmar, Thailand, or Sri Lanka, but severe strains and dislocations have been felt, and institutional Buddhism has been forced to adapt in significant ways. In this section we will examine the nature of these adaptations and the continuing challenges to the present and future well-being of Buddhism in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. The focus will be on the changing roles of the monk and the laity, and reform movements occurring within the Buddhist sangha.<sup>3</sup>

## THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE MONK

Traditionally, one looks to the Pali scriptures for relevant background information about the place and role of the Buddhist monk in the Indian society. In one of the dialogues found in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle Length

Sayings of the Buddha) between the Buddha's blessed disciple, Ananda, and a military general, the general expresses his appreciation for the presence of the sangha. Ananda, in turn, thanks the general for his protection, which enables monks safely to pursue their practice in a peaceful society. In the Future Dangers Sutta in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (Gradual Sayings of the Buddha), the factors listed that jeopardize dhamma practice are: famine, war, and social unrest, as well as specifically religious issues such as schisms in the sangha, lax disciplinary practice among the monks caused by desire for material comforts, and living too closely to laypeople or nuns. In the frame story found in the Dangers of the Palace Paritta, people disapprove when a monk visits a king too frequently. And in several Pali *suttas* the Buddha, while expressing a preference for a republican form of government, nevertheless accommodates himself to the emerging monarchies of his time.

What can we conclude about the role of the monk from these examples from the Pali canon? The picture that emerges is this: the practice of Buddhism depends upon peaceful, prosperous social conditions; monastic involvement in politics should be on an individual level, for example, advising individual rulers to promote more enlightened policies; monks were not forbidden from advising rulers but were warned about the dangers of such a role; and lastly, the Buddha did not agitate for structural changes in the form of government, although he preferred republics over monarchies. These examples from the Theravada scriptures provide us with a picture of the sangha actively involved in the social, economic, and political life of its day, not as an institution only pursuing narrowly construed religious goals. The major issue was not whether monks should be involved in various human affairs, but rather, what determines the appropriate role for a monk to play in society and in politics.<sup>4</sup>

How has the role of the monk in modern Buddhist Southeast Asia changed? Or, has the role of the monk remained essentially the same but within a significantly altered social, economic, and political environment? There are no simple answers to these questions, which continue to be debated by both adherents and scholars of Buddhism. Today monks engage in a range of activities that previously were regarded as beyond the realm of legitimate

monastic activity. Monks made an important contribution to independence movements in Myanmar and Sri Lanka in the early twentieth century. Vietnamese monks protested against the corrupt Diem regime in the late 1960s through dramatic acts of self-immolation.<sup>5</sup> It was during the mid-1970s that Thai monks became involved on both the political left and the right. Theravada monks in Southeast Asia actively address many contemporary social and economic issues, which include the increasing gap between the rich and the poor in the developing world, the exploitation of women in the workplace and as prostitutes, the scourge of AIDS, and the destruction of the natural environment.

Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia have taken leadership roles in causes that have led to both direct and indirect political consequences. Superficially, such involvement seems antithetical to the traditional role of the Theravada monk. Or is it? The monastic order provides an alternative to the householder's pursuit of mundane goals; however, the monkhood has never been isolated from politics or society. Indeed, by its very existence the monastery is so embedded in a social context that it cannot avoid being drawn into the political realm. Throughout its history, Theravada monks have advised political leaders with varying degrees of influence. Contemporary monks have justified their political activism on the grounds of historical precedent and sociological inevitability. Even so, as the contrasts between scenarios from the Pali canon and contemporary Southeast Asia demonstrate, it is the *form* of political and social involvement by monks that has changed dramatically from the early days of the monastic order.<sup>6</sup>

Today, if monks are perceived primarily as political manipulators or performing roles in society that are perceived as secular rather than religious, then they run the risk of undermining the symbolic status accorded to the sangha as an embodiment and propagator of the Buddha's dhamma.<sup>7</sup> Whether or not the traditional moral and spiritual status of the monk is compromised by monks taking on nontraditional monastic roles depends upon the nature of these activities and the ways in which they engage them. Monks who are perceived as self-serving and pursuing worldly goals run the risk of losing the respect of fellow monks and the laity, whether they are performing traditional

roles or fashioning new ones. But those monks who personally embody the moral and spiritual ideals of Buddhism and speak to political and social issues with the authority of dhammic insight will most likely retain the respect and win the admiration of their monastic peers and thoughtful laypersons, even though their activities may trouble conservative traditionalists.

Monastic behavior that contravenes social mores and moral norms poses an even more serious threat to the integrity of the sangha. As a case in point, Charles F. Keyes contends that a series of sexual and financial scandals has undermined the moral authority of the Thai sangha.<sup>8</sup> These issues will be examined under three headings: the monk and politics, the monk and society, and sangha reform.



*Figure 3.1. Monks at a computer class. Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Wat Suan Dok, Chiang Mai, Thailand.*

## The Monk and Politics

In the contemporary period, Theravada monks have played various roles in the modern nation-state of which they are a part. In general, monks willingly have supported traditional political legitimation processes. The sanghas in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar are organized under the aegis of their governments, from which they may receive stipends and are awarded ecclesiastical honors. Specific examples of the interaction between monks and the state will illustrate the social and political complexities of this symbiotic relationship.

In Sri Lanka, the sangha actively supported S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike who was elected prime minister in 1956, yet only two years later a disgruntled Sinhalese monk was held responsible for his assassination. This act led to a strong public reaction against monastic involvement in politics, although, today, Sinhalese politicians continue to solicit support from influential monastic leaders, and monks have formed a political party, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) or National Heritage Party. A typical negative sentiment against monastic involvement “in the world” was expressed in a letter to the monthly publication of the Colombo Young Men’s Buddhist Association: “the Buddhist public are naturally embarrassed and dismayed to find bhikkhus in vehicles, with briefcases tucked under their arms, looking quite brisk and business-like, meticulously handling money, haunting shops, cinemas and public places, with all the materialistic fervor of dedicated worldlings.”<sup>9</sup>

In Thailand in 1962, the government expelled Phra Phimontham from the sangha. He was the popular prodemocracy abbot of Wat Mahathat in Bangkok, the largest Mahanikai monastery in the country on fabricated charges that he was a communist.<sup>10</sup> The Kampuchean (Cambodian) government under Pol Pot not only disestablished the sangha, but also actively tried to destroy it. Burmese monks in Yangon and Mandalay were imprisoned and some were killed in 1989 when they protested the military government’s repression of political freedom. For several days in September 2007, Burmese monks were at the forefront of the largest antigovernment protests in twenty years. As reported in the *Wall Street Journal*:



After evening prayers on Sept. 18, the abbot of a small monastery in Myanmar's largest city convened the roughly 30 Buddhist monks in his charge. The bonds between secular and religious authority had broken, the abbot said. Then he gave the monks his blessing to take to the streets in protest. That meeting, one of many held in monasteries across Myanmar in mid-September, helped turn a sputtering campaign of dissent led by secular democracy activists into a mass movement led by Buddhist clergy.<sup>11</sup>

In Sri Lanka many Sinhalese monks have supported the government's battle against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Tamil separatist group who avows to secede and form an independent state on the island. A smaller number of monks have actively pursued reconciliation between the two sides. In Laos, the late Venerable Anantasounthne, the abbot of Wat That Luang in Vientiane, presided over the Lao sangha, which suffered greatly during the post-Vietnam War years. The socialist government restructured monastic education, discouraged ordination into the monkhood, and imposed restrictions on traditional lay support of the monastic order. In Thailand in 2006, adherents of Santi Asok, a reformist Buddhist movement, participated in demonstrations against the administration of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and called for his resignation. Earlier, during the politically volatile period between 1973 and 1976, Buddhist monks joined farmers, students, and workers to demand greater freedom of assembly and expression, more just and equitable economic policies, and greater government accountability.<sup>12</sup> Yet, other monks publicly supported entrenched military authorities and right-wing political organizations. One of the most controversial of the politically active monks in the 1970s was Bhikkhu Kitthiwuttho.<sup>13</sup>

Kitthiwuttho was born in 1936 and ordained in 1957. Very early in his monastic career he proved himself an able public speaker and administrator. He established a foundation for the study and propagation of Buddhism at a major Bangkok monastery, and he opened a school for novices and monks located about a hundred kilometers from Bangkok in Chonburi Province. Between October 1973 and October 1976, a period that began and ended with two massive student demonstrations, Kitthiwuttho spoke out openly

on political issues and even led a political demonstration in Bangkok. He strongly supported the government with anticommunist speeches and writings critical of radical groups and social disruption, and was associated with right-wing political movements: the Village Scouts, the Red Guards, and the Nawaphon (New Power Movement).<sup>14</sup>

In a speech delivered on August 16, 1975, entitled, *Sing Thi Khuan Khamnueng* (Things We Should Reflect On), Kitthiwuttho argued for Thai national unity in the face of divisiveness at home and threats to Thailand's border areas. He urged support for the government, obedience to the law, and criticized the disruptive tactics by prodemocracy groups. In particular, he offered three solutions to the political and social problems facing Thai society: the practice of moral virtues (*sila*), the training of the mind (*samadhi*), and the attainment of knowledge (*pañña*). On the surface, these solutions seem to be conventional, mainstream Theravada Buddhist teachings, but Kitthiwuttho gave each of them a uniquely nationalistic slant.

*Sila* is interpreted in general terms by Kitthiwuttho to be the five precepts every Buddhist should follow, one being not to take the life of sentient beings. He emphasized the prohibition against lying, especially with the intent to sow the seeds of dissension. On the individual level, Kitthiwuttho interprets *sila* to mean being morally pure and avoiding wrongdoing, but on the societal level, he interprets *sila* as the law of the nation. If everyone embodies *sila*, he exhorted, then everyone will automatically obey the law (i.e., support the status quo) and peace and civil order will reign.<sup>15</sup>

Kitthiwuttho interpreted the training of the mind as having a mind that is loyal to the country—one that does not easily waver or bend in the winds of this or that ideology. Both the practice of mindfulness (*sati*) and attainment of wisdom (*pañña*) assume a practical, political orientation. Thailand's problems, he stressed, stem from citizens' failure to understand their duties and responsibilities to society. Only by having such an understanding can the people correct social ills and build a happy, peaceful, and orderly nation. Kitthiwuttho ended his speech with an appeal to the symbols of Thai national unity, "nation, religion, king," as represented by the three colors (red, white, and blue) of the Thai flag. "The Buddha taught us," stated the monk, "that

whenever we are frightened we should look at the flag and have steadfast hearts.”<sup>16</sup>

A year later in July 1976, Kitthiwuttho addressed an audience of government and religious leaders at the college he founded. This address was an elaboration of an interview that appeared in the liberal Thai magazine, *Caturat*, in which Kitthiwuttho developed his ideas about the role of the monk in the context of the political crisis created, in part, by the student-led revolution of 1973, the subsequent creation of a parliamentary system of government in Thailand, and the communist victories in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.<sup>17</sup> In what has become his most infamous speech, “Killing Communists Is Not Demeritorious,” he marshaled several arguments to justify his claim that killing communists would not produce negative kamma, that is, suffering in this life or some future life. In the interview he stated that because communists attack the nation, the religion, and the king, they are subhuman. To kill them is akin to killing Satan or Mara in the Buddhist context.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, he argued, the merit accrued from protecting the nation, the religion and the monarchy was greater than the demerit from taking the life of a communist.

In this speech, which was later printed as a pamphlet by his foundation, Kitthiwuttho reiterated his statement that soldiers who kill communists gain more merit for protecting the nation, the religion, and the king than the demerit from taking life. Citing the Buddha and scripture as authority for his position, he argued that some people are so worthless that to kill them is, in fact, to kill *kilesa* (impurity).<sup>19</sup> Killing communists is like purging the body of impurities and the ideologies responsible for the horrible deaths of millions of people in China, Laos, and Cambodia, he asserted.<sup>20</sup> In addition to these arguments Kitthiwuttho reinterpreted the criteria that defined the first precept (*sila*), the prohibition against taking life: the being must be alive; knowledge that the being is alive; there is an intent to kill; one is acting in order to kill; and finally, death itself. Kitthiwuttho argued that those who kill with the intention of protecting the nation, the religion, and the king are exempt from the necessary conditions that prohibit taking the life of a living being. Such casuistic reasoning prompted his Thai

Buddhist critics to contend that Kitthiwuttho was at least as anti-Buddhist as he was anti-communist.

Kitthiwuttho continued to be a controversial figure. Political liberals criticized him for his support by conservative right-wing political groups, and thoughtful Buddhist laypersons charged that he subverted the dhamma for his own political purposes. His entrepreneurialism also came under attack. His school and a retirement center in Choburi attracted millions of baht in investment, but in 1994 his foundation was investigated by the government and accused of mismanagement of funds.

Kitthiwuttho and other monks whose behavior contravene the norms of monastic discipline (*vinaya*) and Thai monastic deportment undermine the symbolic status of the Thai monk as a moral and spiritual exemplar. Sexual scandals surrounding Phra Nikon Thammawathi, who studied at Kitthiwuttho's Cittaphawan College, and Phra Yantra Amaro, both charismatic monks with large followings, became headline news in the mid-1990s. Although both were eventually expelled from the sangha, the reputation of the monastic institution and of Thai Buddhism itself was seriously sullied.

Kitthiwuttho has been a supporter of Wat Thammakai (Dhammakaya), Thailand's fastest growing Buddhist movement.<sup>21</sup> Officially registered with the government in 1978, Wat Thammakai has attracted the backing of the military and political leaders as well as the patronage of the royal family. The movement, which is known as Wat Thammakai, was established in the early 1970s by Chaiyaboon Sitthiphon (Phra Thammachayo/Dhammajayo) and his friend, Phadet Phongasawat (Phra Tattachiwo/Dattajivo). As students at Kasetsart University in Bangkok, they became disciples of Chanda Khonnokyong, a female meditation teacher in the lineage of the late Venerable Mongkhon Thepmuni (Luang Pho Sot), abbot of Wat Paknam Phasi Charoen in Bangkok. Following their completion of advanced degrees in business administration and marketing, they were ordained at Wat Paknam in 1969. Thammachayo pledged to work for the worldwide renewal of Buddhism, starting in Thailand. Currently, Wat Thammakai boasts twenty-eight centers in Thailand. Its first international branch, established in the United States in 1992, has grown to thirty-eight worldwide, including eight in the U.S.

Wat Thammakai exhibits many features common to new mass religious movements: a charismatic founder; an emphasis on direct religious experience; a simple but specific form of practice and teaching; a reaction against orthodox institutional structure; a materialistic orientation; a desire to be modern; an emphasis on participation by all members in religious rituals and ceremonies; and the establishment of a sacred center.<sup>22</sup> Wat Thammakai is noted for promoting a distinctive form of meditation practice (*vijja-dhammakaya*) for both monks and laity, a method attributed to Luang Pho Sot that uses breathing rhythms, mantra recitation, and visualization of a crystal ball as a focus of concentration. Equally unique within the context of modern Thai Buddhism, the movement conducts mass communal ceremonies at its national center at Pathum Thani near Bangkok, where Wat Thammakai is promoted as a new form of Thai Buddhist civic religion that functions much like the sacred center of a national and even global mandalic polity. From an original site of approximately one hundred acres, Wat Thammakai now encompasses over one thousand acres; furthermore, its assertive assistant abbot, Tattachiwo, has been quoted as claiming that Wat Thammakai intends to expand to over one hundred thousand acres.<sup>23</sup> On this site the movement has built a series of impressive structures unique in Thai temple architectural styles. The Mahathamkai Chedi, dedicated in 1998 and built at the cost of thirty million baht (approximately US\$885,000), resembles a giant spaceship. The buildings include: memorial halls dedicated to its two spiritual founders, Phra Mongkhol Thepmuni and Khun Yai Achan Chanda Khonnokyong; a large meditation amphitheater; and a dining hall that can accommodate the thousands of devotees who are bused to Wat Thammakai for major festivals, ordinations, and other ritual events. Over one hundred thousand devotees attend major ceremonies, such as the giving of *kathina* robes at end of the Buddhist Rains Retreat. The Thammakai movement, furthermore, has become a major influence in the Buddhist student associations on most Thai university campuses. Through its national headquarters, its network of dhamma practice centers throughout the country, and its influence on university student groups, the Thammakai movement seeks to restore a uniform—and some might say regimented—Buddhist civic religion in the



*Figure 3.2. The Mahathammakai Chedi. Pathum Thani, Thailand. Courtesy of Martha Butt.*

face of an increasingly fragmented Thai society and a political environment beset by corruption and factionalism that undermines the symbolic, unifying power of the monarchy and the practical significance of Buddhism.

Critics of Wat Thammakai point out that the strategies and goals of the movement are excessively worldly. With millions of dollars in assets, its aggressive recruiting methods, and a commercial approach to evangelism, the movement has been characterized as “religious consumerism.”<sup>24</sup>

Urban Thai society is ruled by consumer culture, and the Dhammakaya [Thammakai] movement—by integrating capitalism into its structure—has become popular with contemporary urban Thais who equate efficiency, orderliness, cleanliness, elegance, grandeur, spectacle, . . . and material success with goodness. Dhammakaya, then, could be viewed as a capitalist version of Buddhism aimed at urban Thais who are used to comfort, convenience, and the instant gratification found in consumer society.<sup>25</sup>

Critics also charge that the movement has served the narrow interests of the economic and political elites; that an alliance between Wat Thammakai and the Thai Rak Thai Party of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra promoted a culture of deceit, corruption, and polarization with little attention given to Thailand's increasing social and economic problems; that the leaders of the movement lack knowledge of the dhamma and instead promote heterodox interpretations of the self and nibbana; and that the movement has made exaggerated claims for the spiritual attainment of its founder.<sup>26</sup> In 1999, the abbot, Thammachayo, was charged with embezzling temple funds and for distorting Theravada Buddhist teachings. Eventually, on August 22, 2006, the Criminal Court dismissed the charges on the grounds that the abbot had returned all of the 959.3 million baht suspected of being misappropriated from the temple, and that he had agreed to teach according to traditional Buddhist doctrines as instructed by the Supreme Sangha Council. Despite the controversy surrounding Thammachayo, the Thai Senate honored him for contributing to two memorial services in Phuket and Phang Nga Provinces after the tsunami struck southern Thailand in December 2005.

Wat Thammakai continues to attract dedicated lay volunteers, many of whom become "evangelists" (*kalayanamit*) committed to spreading the "gospel" of the movement. However, the movement is also marked by internal conflict. Dr. Mano Mettanando Laohavanich, one of its former prominent scholar-monks (Venerable Dr. Mettanando Bhikkhu) has become a severe critic of Wat Thammakai, and the Venerable Phra Bhavanavisutthikun (Sermchai Chayamonkhon) left the movement to found Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakairam in Ratchaburi.

### The Monk and Society

The Theravada monastic order is inextricably embedded in the modern social fabric of Buddhist Southeast Asia, even though the sangha took shape in a world vastly different from the social and cultural circumstances confronting it today. Urban life in the modern metropolis stands in stark contrast to

the monarchical city-state, as does the lifestyle of the rural farmer today in comparison to his premodern counterpart. Because traditionally the majority of young men in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia ordained for a brief period of time as a monk, families participated directly and personally in the life of the bhikkhu sangha. Furthermore, the doctrines of kamma and rebirth formed the foundation for the moral ethos of Theravada cultures just as the philosophy of merit making gives meaning to most lay religious activities. On a day-to-day level, the monastery served local communities as school, orphanage, a nursing home for the elderly, bank, pharmacy, and counseling center.

The centrality of the monk and the monastery in Theravada societies has eroded in recent decades under the impact of rapid economic, political, and social change. As these societies have become more urbanized, commercialized, and westernized, governments have assumed many of the services once provided by monks as diverse as educator, pharmacist, doctor, and agricultural consultant. Furthermore, the increasingly pervasive atmosphere of secular rationalism and materialism threaten the values associated with non-greed, compassion, and equanimity that describe the moral ethos of the Theravada worldview. In the face of these challenges, Buddhist monks have found new ways to remain relevant to modern society. The following examples are seen as suggestive of some of them. Not all monks feel the need to change; many still abide by traditional forms of religious expression and practice as described in part 1 of this monograph, forms that still remain meaningful to large segments of Buddhist populations in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

In Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka, monks continue to participate in programs of rural and urban uplift and social welfare. As with the sangha's political involvement, some of these programs are more compatible with the normative teachings of the tradition than others, and the nature of the monk's activities less detrimental to the symbolic value of the position of the monk. Regarding monastic sponsorship of and involvement in development and welfare programs, one student of Theravada Buddhism observed over thirty years ago:



Formerly the monk had been, ideally and often actually, a community leader—educator, sponsor of cooperative work activities, personal and social counselor, and ethical mentor—in the nearly static traditional village. Now, if he is to “resume” such a role, he would have to become at least modestly competent in a whole range of “modern” activities, such as literacy campaigns, modern and technical education, agricultural extension and “community development.” . . . All of these are activities designed to generate social and cultural dynamism as well as economic change. The important thing to grasp here is that there is some considerable difference between the essentially conservative “traditional role” of the monk in rural areas and any credible community leadership role today; for many of the activities now proposed are of a radically different character from those to which a monk sometimes gave leadership a century ago.<sup>27</sup>

Modern forms of monastic involvement in social welfare and rural development became increasingly important in Sri Lanka and Myanmar in the early days of national independence from colonial rule. In Myanmar projects sponsored by the Buddha Sasana Council created by U Nu included establishing schools for hill tribe children and vocational training.<sup>28</sup> In Sri Lanka various social service and welfare projects were sponsored by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. There were other organizations that linked monk and laity in common endeavors. The Ceylon Farmers’ Association, for example, was established with the general aim of providing “for the spiritual and material welfare of the people of Ceylon throughout the island through the medium of the Sangha dedicated to the service of mankind and the welfare of the country.”<sup>29</sup> The Sarvodaya Shramadana movement has initiated many of the Buddhist social welfare projects in recent years. Since 1958, it has recruited more than eight hundred thousand volunteers to work in rural uplift and development projects in over fifteen thousand villages, reaching a population of over four million. The movement has attracted considerable international attention and financial support. Although founded by A. T. Ariyaratne, a layman, monks have been a significant factor in the success of the movement.<sup>30</sup> George Bond argues that whereas earlier Sinhalese social service movements were patterned after Christian missionary models, more

recent social movements such as the Sarvodaya Shramadana “represent serious attempts to establish and put into practice a socially relevant interpretation of the *Dhamma*.”<sup>31</sup>

In Thailand, several programs were established in the 1960s and 1970s to train monks in the areas of rural uplift, community development, and public welfare. One was the Project for Encouraging the Participation of Monks in Community Development, established in 1966 under the sponsorship of the two Buddhist universities for Thai monks. By 1973 the program had conducted three training sessions for approximately 250 monk-trainees. The 1973 training program focused on the greater Bangkok metropolitan area to address, in particular, the pressing problems for the monks in 450 monastery-temples. The training program focused on three main areas: to improve sangha administration in urban areas; promote knowledge about the conditions and problems of society; and investigate ways in which monks could contribute to solutions of urban problems.

The main justification given for the sponsorship by Buddhist universities of monastic training programs in community development during the 1960s and 1970s was based on the premise that the traditional role formerly played by the sangha in Thai society was at risk. In recent times, society has changed but the sangha has not, the program leaders contended. Phra Mahachai, a chief administrator of the 1973 training program, observed that traditionally Buddhism was at the heart of Thai society, but that role was being seriously challenged in contemporary Thailand. He cited two main reasons for this development: recent societal changes have led people to desert Buddhism and its essential values; secular institutions have made adjustments and improvements in delivering social services, whereas the monastic order as an institution has not changed significantly and, as a consequence, has declined in the estimation of the people.<sup>32</sup> The solution, argued Phra Mahachai, lay with the monastic order which should develop new roles for the sangha to perform in Thai society, and that its responsibilities must extend beyond the confines of the monastery and monastery-related activities to meet the daily needs of the people whose lives have become increasingly complex. These

views continue to be echoed by monks working in the areas of environmental conservation, HIV/AIDS hospice work, and local social services.

The Project for Encouraging the Participation of Monks in Community Development and similar training programs resulted in a significant number of monks becoming involved in the formal study of subjects in which they had been previously untrained. Many monks reported that one of the valuable benefits derived from the training program was the practical knowledge gained.<sup>33</sup> The monks who graduated from the program put this knowledge to use in their home districts. New buildings on monastery compounds were constructed, wells dug, new roads built, dams and irrigation channels constructed, and public health programs encouraged—all resulting from skills gained by the monks.

In most cases, just the mere presence of the monk on the work site provided sufficient incentive and guidance for the project. With some exceptions, monks did not engage in actual labor, which was done by the laity but supervised by monks. It is important to note that this labor was regarded as being of religious as well as practical value, and it was perceived by the laypeople as meritorious, because it was overseen by the person who symbolized the source of merit, namely, the monk. Although the form of the monks' activities differed from traditional roles, the reciprocal structure of the relationship between the monk and the laity was preserved intact. This relationship is more difficult to maintain when the monk steps outside of traditionally defined roles.

The fundamental issue at stake regarding the participation of monks in rural uplift, social welfare, community development, and environmental conservation is whether or not the sangha's symbolic value is undermined if the monk acts in ways that contravene culturally sanctioned roles. Although the sangha has never been regarded as "otherworldly," nevertheless, its teachings and disciplines have set it apart as a vocation distinct from mundane roles. The monk symbolizes religious (*lokuttara*) ends rather than worldly (*lokiya*) ones. For this reason, the sangha has been perceived as a mediator between the goals of the mundane world and the ideals of spiritual transformation. If the sangha sacrifices its power to represent these ideals and becomes overly

identified with worldly activities, then its symbolic status will be threatened and the reciprocal bonds that exist between the monastic order and the laity will be compromised. If this reciprocity is lost, then the very reason for the existence of the monastic order has been compromised.

This problem has been exacerbated by high-profile cases of monastic malfeasance and the increasing commercialization of the sangha. The former is exemplified by the well-publicized cases of Phra Nikon Thammawathi (Nikorn Dhammavadi) and Phra Yantra Amaro, both of whom were forced to disrobe for breaking the *parajika* rule prohibiting sexual relations with women. Another example is Luang Pho Khun Parisuttho who became the focus of a national cult that emphasizes the acquisition of wealth and power. He was characterized as “a living patron saint” during the Thai economic



*Figure 3.3. Monks working at a reforestation project. Mae Rim, Thailand. Courtesy of Thomas Borchert.*

boom of the 1990s, and his images and other cult objects brought millions of baht into the coffers of his monastery in northeast Thailand.<sup>34</sup>

Somboon Suksamran makes an important distinction between monks involved in government programs that manipulate the sangha for political ends and those monks known as *phra nak phatthana* or “development monks” who voluntarily dedicate their lives to liberate rural populations from oppression, exploitation, poverty, and ignorance.<sup>35</sup> Somboon argues that monks who participated in government sponsored rural development programs jeopardized their prestige and position by being associated with policies that, in fact, actually perpetuated rural underdevelopment. The former group of monks represents an extraordinary response to the rapid social, economic, and political changes since the 1970s that sought to improve the quality of rural life, strengthen self-reliance and self-respect, and preserve community culture. Coincidentally, Somboon contends that these development monks are a crucial factor for the very survival of the Thai sangha.<sup>36</sup>

Apropos Somboon’s argument, some of the most noteworthy and effective efforts by the Thai sangha to address current problems of social and economic need have been developed by individual monks responding to specific situations rather than as a part of any official government initiative. The vitality of programs begun in the 1960s and 1970s continued under the leadership of such able monks as Phrakhru Sakhon in Samutsongkram Province, Luang Pho Nan in Surin Province, and Luang Pu Chan (AKA Phra Phutthaphotnawarphon, Phra Dhammatilok, and Phra Kavi Kusalo) in Chiang Mai Province. Of special importance in regard to environmental protection are the ecology or forest conservation monks (Thai, *phra nak anurak pa*), represented by Phra Prachak, Phrakhru Phitak, Phra Phothirangsi, and Achan Phongsak.<sup>37</sup>

### Development Monks and Ecology Monks in Thailand

In 1962 Phrakhru Sakhon Sangworakit became the abbot of Wat Yokkrabat in Samut Songkhram Province located about forty miles west of Bangkok. At that time the Yokkrabat subdistrict (*tambon*) was poor, drought-ridden,



*Figure 3.4. Phrakhru Sakhon Sangworakit. Wat Yokkrabat, Samut Songkhram Province, Thailand. Sketch by Namu.*

mosquito-infested, and lacked public transportation. Salt water had infiltrated the ground water supply. The villagers supported themselves by fishing, cutting timber, and selling forest products. Crime, drugs, and alcoholism were rife. Phrakhru Sakhon first addressed the villagers' material concerns: "If you have the four basic needs, namely food, . . . [housing], clothes, and medicine, other things will follow. Education, culture, . . . [morality], and [social] unity will follow. Gambling and crime, drugs and misbehaviour will . . . [diminish]."<sup>38</sup>

Teaching by example, Phrakhru Sakhon solved the water problem by digging wells and constructing small canals from freshwater sources. Paddy fields were banked to protect against the intrusion of salt water. He encouraged villagers to plant coconut palms, but when the market price of coconuts fell, he suggested that they switch to planting sugar palms. Other community

development projects followed: cutting a new access road to the village to ease transportation of goods to the district center; building a dam to prevent the spread of salt water; electrification of the village; and promoting the planting of new crops. To accomplish these goals, Phrakhru Sakhon not only had to set an example to motivate the villagers, he also had to fight against the exploitation of middlemen, traders, and creditors, and he brought pressure to bear on government officials. Primarily he acted as a catalyst and coordinator among teachers, village headmen, local administrators and the police. By 1984 he had raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to establish a foundation for community development.

The economic development of Yokkrabat district led to an unforeseen problem—greater prosperity highlighted an unknown disparity between the middle class and the poor. The villagers had become more materialistic and selfish. The abbot put it this way:

During the time that there was no road young people came to work together transporting sand to the temple, often working till one or two o'clock at night. It gave me the opportunity to be close to them. I taught them Dhamma at the same time. They had unity. When the work was done they would say 'our canal, our road' . . . They participated so actively in all [the] work that they could not feel otherwise. . . . Today things are different. You have . . . to have incentives. We can hardly find people who are ready to . . . sacrifice for the community for 4–5 days. They live much better today. They are no longer so poor. They have a lot of money and also spend a lot . . . They are used to comfort, . . . to going everywhere by car. They cannot walk anymore.<sup>39</sup>

When Phrakhru Sakhon became concerned about the increasing consumerist mentality of the villagers, the increasing impact of urban values through the mass media, and the flight from the village by its urban-educated youth, he sought ways to develop a greater sense of community solidarity and mutual concern. Through the monastery he established a youth group, a women's group, a professional group, and a credit union. The credit union functions as a people's bank: "The principle of the credit union is love and



sharing. The rich help the poor and all help one another not to be exploited by outsiders.”<sup>40</sup> Through the credit union the abbot had two principles in mind: mutual responsibility within the community and the promotion of a locally diversified economy to shield the community from the vagaries of a free market. His goals sound like Gandhi’s concept of self-reliance: “[Villagers] should work out what they need in their family first, such as raising fish, growing vegetables and [coconut] trees that can be used in the long term. They can sell the surplus in order to have money to buy things they cannot produce themselves. In such a way the villagers will depend less on the market. At the same time they will live a more simple life.”<sup>41</sup>

Many other Thai monks are dedicated to alleviating the social and economic problems in their local communities. Like Phrakhu Sakhon, they also emphasize the connection between “outer” social and economic change and “inner” personal transformation. For example, Luang Pho Nan (Phrakhu Phiphitprachanat), the abbot of Wat Samakkhi, Surin Province in northeast Thailand, sponsors many community development projects from farm cooperatives to rice banks but emphasizes the central value of meditation to all aspects of life: “We need the spiritual dimension in all development activities. Without spiritual life we cannot start carrying out a real development.”<sup>42</sup> Traditional merit-making rituals are also given a practical, socially relevant significance. Instead of donations to the monastery that often duplicate articles far beyond need and use, Luang Pho Nan has adapted these ceremonies for the benefit and well-being of the entire village. For example, the monetary donations given to Wat Samakkhi at the *phithi pha pa* or “forest robe giving ceremony” when monks are presented with new robes at the end of the harvest season, the funds now become the shared property of the village to be used to support rice cooperatives.<sup>43</sup>

Eminent among development monks in northern Thailand was the late Luang Pu Chan Kusalo, abbot of Chiang Mai’s historic Thammaiyut monastery, Wat Chedi Luang. Luang Pu Chan devoted much of his long and distinguished monastic career to the uplift of the rural poor.<sup>44</sup> In 1959 he founded a secondary school (Metta Suksa) for poor village children in Chiang Mai Province, and in 1974 he established the Foundation for Education and





*Figure 3.5. The late Luang Pu Chan. Courtesy of Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai, Thailand.*

Development of Rural Areas (FEDRA), headquartered at Wat Pa Dara Phirom, a monastery Luang Pu Chan founded on the site of an abandoned crematorium in Mae Rim near Chiang Mai. The foundation, administered by a staff of seventeen and directed by Saengwongchai Munrat, oversees its work in agriculture and education. By 1996 FEDRA had sponsored projects in eighty-nine villages in three provinces that included rice, water buffalo, and cattle banks from which farmers could borrow in times of need, a credit union, cooperatives, and educational projects to train village youth in modern agricultural techniques and marketable vocational skills. Over the years support has come from the Social Welfare Council of Thailand, contributions from international foundations, and private donations within Thailand. Currently, a Thai woman doctor, Namthong Khunwisan, is FEDRA's major financial supporter of a budget of more than four million baht (US\$118,000).

Because prostitution is such a pervasive and lucrative industry in Thailand, Luang Pu Chan was particularly concerned to empower young women to earn sufficient income by mastering the skills of native handicrafts, such as weaving, dressmaking, or wicker work, to counterbalance the economic lure of what has become a major social, moral, and health problem for Thailand.<sup>45</sup>

Other cottage industries with a guaranteed commercial market promoted by the foundation include ceramics, artificial flowers, mulberry paper (*sa*) products, and the cultivation of medicinal herbs. The women's training unit (Mettanaree) is headquartered at a school staffed by eight teachers located three kilometers from Wat Pa Dara Phirom. Approximately fifty young women between the ages of fifteen and eighteen study in a two year program that teaches them practical skills, boosts their self-confidence, and promotes the value of cooperative work, all of which empowers local communities.

It was apparent from my visit to Wat Pa Dara Phirom in 2008 that the monastery and the work of FEDRA have garnered significant support from lay donors. Substantial buildings, including a magnificent image hall (*vihara*), have been erected during the past decade. However, despite the construction, the care with which the compound is maintained that I observed over a decade ago is still apparent, and even though Luang Pu Chan is now deceased, his teachings are visibly present through his sayings written on small wooden plaques attached to the many trees planted on the grounds. The following examples illustrate the wisdom, compassion, and humor he brings to his work:

Anxiety poisons life. The past is a dream and the future is uncertain; only the present can be mended.

To solve the problems of life is neither to multiply the quantity nor to escape; it is to search for their causes. Having found the cause, the problem is half-solved.

He who does good for self-glorification will be spurned by others; he who does good truthfully will live peacefully.

Luxurious living turns one into a millionaire on loans.

Sweating when young is better than repenting when old.

Nothing is new in the world except constant change.<sup>46</sup>

The legacy of Luang Pu Chan and the initiatives of Phrakhrū Sakhon, Luang Pho Nan, and other Thai monks who continue to develop programs to address the social and economic problems of their communities, exemplify in local and practical ways the philosophy of “sufficiency economy” (*setthakit pho phiang*) enunciated by King Bhumibol in 1997. In response to Thailand’s economic crisis that year, his majesty argued for a more balanced economic development that was able to withstand the ups and downs of economic globalization, sustainable economic growth, and greater self-reliance. Skeptics point out that over the past decade the philosophy of sufficiency economy has done little to blunt Thailand’s rampant consumerism or address the growing gap between the wealthy and the poor. However, critics of consumerism (*boriphok niyom*) make the case that sufficiency economy has a transformative potential because it reflects the cultural values associated the Buddhist ethical principles of non-greed and moderation.

We turn now to consider ecology or forest conservation monks (*phra nak anurak pa*), who have grown increasingly concerned about the destruction of the natural environment by powerful economic and government interests and the detrimental effects of forest overuse by villagers. In the early 1990s Phra Prachak Kuttachitto in northeastern Thailand struggled to protect local forests from being converted into eucalyptus plantations to produce wood pulp for export, and to prevent the dislocation of villagers whose economic livelihood depended, in part, on income from forest products. He became noted for his most famous technique to combat government and private schemes by “ordaining” trees with saffron sashes tied around their trunks, a practice adopted by other forest conservation monks and Buddhist NGOs. Susan Darlington observes that symbolically ordaining large trees in an endangered forest serves three purposes: it draws attention to the threat of deforestation; provides an opportunity to teach the values of conservation; and demonstrates the relevance of the dhamma to a rapidly changing world.<sup>47</sup>

Phra Prachak’s outspoken criticism of private business schemes and government policies that endanger community forests and villagers’ livelihood aroused the opposition of powerful economic and political interests that



*Figure 3.6. A yang tree  
“ordained” with a saffron sash.  
Northern Thailand.*

led to his arrest and brief imprisonment for allegedly violating national laws. Faced with government harassment, Phra Prachak disrobed, went into hiding, and disappeared from public view. It was only in 2004 that news of his conviction and subsequent parole appeared in the Thai press.

Phrakhru Phitak Nantakhun is another monk actively engaged in forest conservation work. In 1990 he sponsored tree ordinations in the community forest of his home village to protect four hundred acres of land from development and excessive exploitation by the local population, and in 1991 conducted the same ritual in ten villages along the Nan River.<sup>48</sup> In addition to these important symbolic acts, he educates villagers on environmental issues, instructs young novices in conservation methods, promotes economic alternatives to clearing the forest and planting maize as a cash crop, uses visual aids to show the effects of deforestation, and promotes integrated agricultural

schemes planting for subsistence rather than profit.<sup>49</sup> In Susan Darlington's assessment, "The tree ordination was the symbolic center of Phrakhrū Phitak's conservation program. The discussions with the villagers leading up to the ordination and the conservation activities organized afterwards were all motivated by the emotional and spiritual commitment created by the ceremony . . . . Buddhist symbols were used to stress the religious connection with the forest, and the moral basis of the project."<sup>50</sup>

Some Thai forest ecology monks have received international recognition for their efforts. In 1990 Achan Phongsak Techathammamo, the former abbot of Wat Pha Lat, a small forest monastery on Suthep Mountain near Chiang Mai was a recipient of the Global 500 Roll of Honour given by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP). Working in Mae Soi, a poor, deforested subdistrict of Chom Thong, Chiang Mai Province, Achan Phongsak developed an effective forest preservation project.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, what happened in Mae Soi is not unique to Thailand or to many other parts of the developing world. Prior to 1950, the subdistrict of Mae Soi, like much of Thailand's northern highlands, was covered by a dense, diverse forest, which protected water sources and provided the villagers with water, building materials, food, fuel, and medicinal plants. By the mid-1950s a commercial timber company was granted a government concession to cut selectively teak and other large trees on the Mae Soi plain. Instead, most of the timber was clear-cut. In 1973 a tobacco company was given permission to continue felling trees to use as fuel for curing leaf tobacco. In order to salvage some income from the forest, the villagers completed the destruction of the forest by cutting most of the remaining trees. By 1978 the forest was devastated. To make matters worse, a Hmong hill tribe of a hundred families was resettled in Mae Soi as part of the Thai government's efforts to promote commercial crop production by hill tribe peoples as a substitute for opium production. Extensive use of pesticides on fields of cabbage planted by the Hmong led to pollution of the watershed, conflict with the villagers, and a compromised crop.

Achan Phongsak became familiar with the Mae Soi valley in the 1960s when wandering as a *dhutanga* (ascetical practice) monk. By the mid-1970s,

he had established a meditation center in the area for the use of student activists for whom his monastery, Wat Pha Lat, had become a refuge and discussion center. In 1983 the monk began the task of helping the villagers restore the watershed. First, he advised them to seek permission from the Royal Forestry Department to reclaim the forest area of the Mae Soi valley by designating it as a Buddhist Park as a way of protecting both trees and animals. Second, he sought to change the attitude of the villagers toward the forest by convincing them that environmental problems have a spiritual dimension; that morality is not merely a matter of obeying the Buddhist precepts; it also means striving to achieve a balance between the physical and spiritual, society and the natural environment:

The balance of nature in the environment is achieved and regulated by the functions of the forest . . . . It provides a space for humans to live in peace and contentment. Destroying the forest or not recognizing the value of all the benefits we owe to . . . nature is a lack of morality [*sila-dhamma*]. When we destroy the forest, we offend basic morality, both physical and spiritual. [Human] kind may take whatever the natural world provides, but [we] must also exercise responsible action in order to maintain it. To have a sense of gratitude to nature . . . is to gain an understanding of the essence of Buddhist morality.<sup>52</sup>

Achan Phongsak convinced the villagers that the forest was a source of life, and not an object to be exploited for material gain. He taught them that forests are our first home and second parents as provider of the four requisites of life: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Gradually, he was able to protect and improve the environment of the Mae Soi valley. Volunteer labor groups cleared firebreaks, repaired fences, and laid water pipes. Through the Thammanat Foundation at Wat Pha Lat, private donations were received and administered, and Achan Phongsak established rice and seed banks and a cooperative store. In 1988 the Forestry Department and the Thammanat Foundation began a reforestation project, and in 1989 as a response to disastrous floods in southern Thailand, the government banned all logging

concessions in northern Thailand. Many problems still remain, among them the sensitive issue of hill tribe resettlement. Despite this and other problems, the Conservation Group in the Chom Thong district of the Mae Soi valley now claims 97,000 members; a formal association of forest conservation monks with Achan Phongsak as its head was organized in 1989 to balance conservation and development based on Buddhist principles; and in 1990, it was proposed that the Royal Forestry Department and the Department of Religious Affairs join together to work for the protection of Thailand's forests. Not surprising, the success of activist conservation monks like Phra Prachak and Achan Phongsak has produced repercussions. Achan Phongsak resigned from the monkhood in 1993 on controversial charges that he committed a *parajika* offense against the disciplinary rules punishable by dismissal from the order. Although he has continued his conservation work as a white-robed *anagarika*, "one who renounces the householder life" at his center in Chom Thong, the aging monk is in poor health.

Vested economic interests have attacked the environmental activism of Phra Prachak, Achan Phongsak, and other forest conservation monks. Tragically, on June 17, 2005, Phra Supot Suvacana of the Mettadhamma Forest Sanctuary Dhamma Center in Ban Huai Ngu Nai, Fang District, north of Chiang Mai, was murdered. A group of local influential businessmen who hoped to develop the land on which the Dhamma Center is located, had in the past actively attempted to drive away the monks and their supporters with threats of violence. The Northern Development Monks Network has called for the governmental authorities to find those responsible and bring them to justice, and also urged Buddhist organizations to work together to develop effective standards for protecting and supporting those monks dedicated to conserving Thailand's natural resources.

In addition to the sangha's active involvement in local forest conservation and economic development projects, it is also responding to the problems of drug addiction and the HIV/AIDS crisis in Thailand. One of the oldest and most controversial treatment centers is located at Thamkrabok north of Bangkok in Saraburi Province. The monastery was first established in 1958 by Luang Pho Charoen Panchand, his brother, Luang Pho Chamron, and



their aunt, Mae Chi Bunruen. Upon her death in 1970, she was given the title, Luang Pho Yai, and since then, Mae Chi Bunruen has been venerated as the “patron saint” of Thamkrabok.

In 1959 the Thamkrabok Center established its first heroin and opium drug detoxification program, and over one hundred thousand addicts have been treated there. Even though the abbot received the prestigious Magsaysay Award in 1975 for the monastery’s detoxification program, Thamkrabok has been criticized by the medical establishment for the unconventional nature of its drug treatment program, and attacked by political authorities for treating Hmong refugees from Laos. As a consequence, Thamkrabok lost its monastic status in the Thai sangha.

Finally, noteworthy among the Buddhist groups in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Thailand is the Sangha Metta Project established in 1997 by young monks and novices at Mahamakut Buddhist University in Chiang Mai. The project instructs monks in HIV/AIDS prevention and care in their communities: “Using Buddhist ethics as their guideline, they teach villagers how to avoid high-risk behavior, help to set up support groups, train people with HIV/AIDS in handicrafts, donate their alms and take care of AIDS orphans.”<sup>53</sup>

As these stories indicate, development and conservation monks are making a difference in the lives of the rural poor, while other monks reach out in innovative and sometimes unconventional ways to serve the needs of those marginalized by addiction and HIV/AIDS. Somboon Suksamran’s contention that their work ensures the future viability of the sangha may, indeed, be prophetic. For Theravada Buddhism to remain a vital force in the societies of Southeast Asia, it must respond to deeply felt personal problems, social needs, and the corrosive cultural impact of globalization. In this regard, Buddhism does not differ from other religious traditions. Southeast Asian Buddhism, as well as other world religions, face the challenge of addressing both local and global problems and transforming their traditions to speak with a contemporary voice and act without sacrificing their ethical and spiritual foundations. As these examples demonstrate, part of this transformation has meant reconfiguring the role of the monk in society. Reforming the structures and the



teachings of the tradition itself, however, is an equally important task. Not only the monks and nuns, but also the Buddhist worldview and the institutions that have been shaped by it, must adapt to and help guide the social and economic worlds in which they are embedded.

## REFORMING THE TRADITION

Theravada monks in Southeast Asia, as we have seen, are redefining their role in relationship to contemporary politics, pressing social issues, and current economic problems. Equally important, they have also criticized and attempted to reform inherited models of Buddhist thought and practice. All religious traditions move between times of reformation and counterreformation. Reformations serve to recall a religious tradition to its normative ideals while transforming outmoded institutions and teachings.

Although reformation is not new to Buddhist history, Theravada sanghas have experienced major changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, partially in response to Western influence. We shall briefly examine major nineteenth century reformation movements in Sri Lanka and Myanmar before turning to contemporary Thai reformist movements in greater depth.

### Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand

Nineteenth-century Sri Lanka witnessed the emergence of two reformist sects, the Amarapura and the Ramañña. They arose primarily to counter the domination of the Sinhalese sangha by the *goyigama* caste. In 1800 the Amarapura sect was created when a monk, five novices, and three laymen traveled to the Burmese capital of Amarapura where they were ordained in a ceremony sponsored by King Bodawpaya. In the late nineteenth century, monks of the Amarapura sect led the protest against Christian missions. News of debates between Buddhist monks and Christian missionaries brought the Western theosophist, Henry Steele Olcott, to Sri Lanka in support of Buddhism.



*Figure 3.7. The German monk, Nyanaponika Thera, at the Forest Hermitage, Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1967.*

Olcott, in turn, was a major influence on the Anagarika Dharmapala, a leader of the renewal of Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the period marking the end of British rule on the island. Considered one of the founders of Buddhist modernism, Dharmapala redefined the monk's mission as one of reviving the glories of the Sinhala nation and restoring a pure Buddhism that was rational, ethical, and psychological to the exclusion of what he considered to be the superstitious beliefs and practices of Buddhist folk traditions.<sup>54</sup>

The Ramañña monastic fraternity, also begun in the nineteenth century through a Burmese ordination lineage, advocated a return to strict observance of the monastic discipline and helped revitalize the forest tradition of Buddhist piety and spiritual practice in Sri Lanka.<sup>55</sup> The revival of the tradition of forest monks in Sri Lanka attracted Europeans to the island, several of whom made significant contributions to Pali scholarship: Nyanatiloka Thera

founded the Island Hermitage south of Colombo; Nyanaponika Thera was one of the cofounders of the Buddhist Publication Society and established the Forest Hermitage in Kandy. Both were German. Two British monks, Ñanamoli Thera and Soma Thera, translated important philosophical and meditation texts into English. The revival of the forest tradition, the promotion of Buddhist scholarship, and the mutual cooperation between Asian and Western Theravada monks and laity, combined to strengthen the vitality of Buddhism on the island. Nyanaponika, for example, was known for his scholarly studies of the *Abhidhamma*, the promotion of meditation, translation and analysis of the classical *vipassana* meditation text, the *Satipatthāna Sutta* (The Foundation of Mindfulness), and the promotion of the dhamma among the educated elites of Sri Lanka and in the West through his many publications that appeared through the Buddhist Publication Society.

In the late nineteenth century, a revival of Buddhism occurred in Burma under King Mindon (r. 1853–1878). Mindon convened the Fifth Buddhist Council in 1871 for the purpose of producing a new redaction of the Pali scriptures. It was engraved on 729 marble tablets erected within the precincts of the Kuthodaw Pagoda located at the foot of Mandalay Hill. During this period several reformist sects came into being. New monastic fraternities, the Dwaya and the Shwegyin, advocated a stricter code of monastic conduct than the mainstream Thudhamma tradition.<sup>56</sup> In this respect, they were similar to the so-called puritan reform movements that arose at the same time in Sri Lanka and Thailand. In E. Michael Mendelson's view, the fundamental criterion for sectarian differentiation in Myanmar was "cleaving to the Vinaya."<sup>57</sup> Burmese reform sects objected to what they considered to be the disciplinary laxity of the dominant tradition. Increasingly, it was common to see monks wearing silk robes, eschew eating directly from begging bowls, wearing sandals, using umbrellas, handling money, and attending public entertainment venues. In Burma and Sri Lanka, disagreements over monastic discipline and practice tended to overshadow doctrinal disputes. Doctrinal interests were shaped largely in response to Western critiques of Buddhist thought. For example, Buddhist apologists defended the doctrine of kamma against

the charge that it undermined the freedom of the will, and at the same time argued that Buddhist rationalism trumped Christian fideism.<sup>58</sup>

Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) deserves special attention for his role in the revival of *vipassana* meditation and *abhidhamma* studies in Myamnar. Ordained as a novice at age fifteen under U Nandadhaja Sayadaw, he studied in Mandalay under the Venerable Sankyaung Sayadaw. At the Fifth Council sponsored by King Mindon in 1871, Ledi, a brilliant student, was one of the editors and translators of *abhidhamma* texts. The author of more than seventy manuals (*dīpani*) in English, Pali, and Burmese, among his best known treatises are the *Paramattha Dīpanī*, a commentary on the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha*, and a meditation manual, the *Vipassanā Dīpanī*.<sup>59</sup> Ledi founded the Leditawya Monastery in Monywa, north of Mandalay, however, he often toured throughout the country establishing meditation centers and lecturing on the *vinaya* and *abhidhamma*. Ledi's influence spread beyond Myanmar. His gifted lay disciple, Saya Thet Gyi, taught U Ba Khin (1899–1971) who trained S. N. Goenka (1924–). Goenka's *vipassana* center in Igatpuri, India, has attracted many students from around the world.<sup>60</sup>

Like Sri Lanka and Burma, Thailand also experienced a major reformist impulse in the nineteenth century when the future monarch, Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851–1868), formed the Thammayut sect while he was still a monk. During his monastic tenure (1824–1851), Mongkut engaged in intensive study of the Pali scriptures. In 1840 and 1843 he sent monks to Sri Lanka who returned to Thailand with seventy volumes of the Sinhalese Pali scriptures. The name, Thammayut (Pali, Dhammayutika), meaning “those adhering to the law,” was an apt choice, for Mongkut advocated a stricter adherence to the monastic disciplinary rules (*vinaya*) in contrast to the Mahanikai (Pali, Mahanikaya) sect of Thai Buddhism. As the abbot of the royal monastery, Wat Boworniwes, which became the center of the Thammayut sect, he formulated a reformist “orthodoxy” that included correct procedures for establishing the sacred boundary stones (*sima*) around the perimeter of an ordination hall, the ordination ritual itself, the way that monastic robes were worn (covering both shoulders instead of only one), how to hold the alms bowl, the receiving of robes (*kathina*) presented at the end of the rains

retreat, and the style of Pali chant.<sup>61</sup> Through correspondence with Sinhalese monks who were engaged in defending Buddhism against Christian missionaries, he began to envision Buddhism as a universal religion that could be defended on rational grounds.<sup>62</sup> Protestant missionaries in Thailand had hoped to convert Mongkut, but instead, he skillfully exploited their knowledge of Western science, learned English from them, and enjoyed debating with them on the comparative merits of Christianity and Buddhism.

In the assessment of S. J. Tambiah, Mongkut's reform emphasized scripturalism, intellectualism, and rationalism.<sup>63</sup> The future king laid the foundation for modern Thai Buddhism which became formally institutionalized under Mongkut's son, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1886–1910), and by Supreme Patriarch Wachirayan (Vajirañanavarorasa, 1860–1921), the head of the Thammayut order. The Sangha Administration Act of 1902 incorporated all monks into one national structure; established a hierarchical principle of authority; and created a nationwide system of monastic education. Wachirayan traveled to outlying provinces to ensure that it was being followed.

Essential to the centralization process was the practice of sending monks to Bangkok for their higher studies and the appointment of central Thai monks to high positions in the provincial ecclesiastical hierarchies, which were organized along lines parallel to the national political structure. In addition to his role as administrator, Wachirayan was an able scholar who authored many books that formed the core of the national monastic curriculum. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Khruba Siwichai, a charismatic northern Thai monk, challenged the authority of the new national sangha administration by accepting novices under his tutelage as their instructor (*upajjhaya*), and ordaining them even though he was not officially authorized to do so.<sup>64</sup> Eventually the breach was healed, and even though Buddhism in northern and northeastern Thailand retained some distinctive features, the modern Thai Buddhist sangha initiated by Mongkut and organized by Wachirayan has dominated Buddhism at the national level to the present.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, as in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, reformist trends in Thai Buddhism are particularly indebted to the forest tradition (*araññavasa*) of Theravada Buddhism.

Traditionally the “work” of a monk in Theravada Buddhism has been defined as study (*ganthadhura*) and practice or meditation (*vipassanadhura*), the latter most often associated with forest monasteries. Various permutations of the Theravada forest tradition considered to be closer to the ideals of “pure” Buddhism have influenced the shape of Buddhist reformism and revitalization in Southeast Asia, as have new developments in education and scholarship. Changes in this area have resulted, at least in part, from the impact of Western curricula and modes of inquiry. Although monastic education is still grounded in the study of Buddhist texts, doctrine, and the Pali language, the curricula of monastic colleges and universities also reflect subject matter and disciplines associated with Western education. These institutions include the former monastic colleges in Sri Lanka, Vidyodaya and Vidyalandara, and in Thailand, the Mahamakut and Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist Universities.

Buddhist scholarship, in many cases, has also broken out of the confines of traditional, scripturally based approaches. In the best instances, this has resulted in scholarship firmly grounded in Pali texts and Buddhist doctrine, but fashioned to appeal to an urban, educated audience. In Sri Lanka, several outstanding scholar-monks resided at the Vajirarama Monastery in Colombo, which included the noted Narada Thera (1898–1983). His bilingual Pali and English edition of the *Dhammapada* with notes from the *Dhammapada* commentary was published in the *Wisdom of the East* series. The Venerable Walpola Rahula’s, *What the Buddha Taught*, a skillful interpretation of modernist Buddhist thought, continues to be widely used in Western colleges and universities, even though it is regarded as an *apologia* for Buddhist rationalism. Rahula’s *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, has likewise been critiqued as a celebration of Sri Lanka’s past with an idyllic Buddhist society, monkhood, and kingship rather than a work of objective history.<sup>66</sup>

In Thailand, P. A. Payutto (Phra Prayudh Payutto), whose current monastic title is Phra Brahmaganabhorn (former titles: Dhammapitaka, Debvedi, Rajavaramuni), has emerged as the unrivaled dean of Thai Buddhist scholarship. His magnum opus, *Buddhadhamma*, and his two Buddhist dictionaries

match or surpass the Pali erudition of Wachirayan who is credited with creating the modern monastic educational system still in place today.<sup>67</sup>

Payutto, a former administrator at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, has not limited his scholarly output to dictionaries or exegetical tomes. He has written extensively in both Thai and English on a wide variety of philosophical, social, and cultural subjects. One example is the paper he prepared for the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1993 entitled, "A Buddhist Solution for the Twenty-First Century." Payutto begins his essay with an analysis of the three basic misperceptions he believes are at the heart of today's global problems: humankind is separated from nature and consequently needs to control and manipulate it; fellow human beings are seen as "other" rather than as sharing a common human nature; happiness depends on an abundance of material possessions.<sup>68</sup>

After analyzing the problems resultant from these misperceptions, Payutto argues that Buddhism challenges these beliefs with three counterclaims or truths: human beings are only one element within a natural system of cause and effect; all beings are co-dwellers within this system of natural laws (e.g., birth, suffering, death); and true happiness is comprised of three freedoms: external freedom (sufficiency of four necessities—food, clothing, shelter, and medicine); freedom from social harassment because of class, race, gender, and so forth; and above all, the inner freedom that comes from true wisdom and equanimity. Living in terms of these truths results in a balanced harmonious life, one that is lived both for the benefit of oneself and of others.<sup>69</sup> In the essay, Payutto integrates a Buddhist mode of cause and effect argumentation and a doctrinally grounded analysis of the nature of things with an informed understanding of the problems of the contemporary world.

### The Forest Ideal and Its Legacies

The forest dwelling ideal and its association with meditation practice played a major role in promoting reform movements in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Michael Carrith-

ers has shown that Sinhalese forest monks inspired a reformist tradition in Sri Lanka that emphasized the attainment of liberation in this life, a fundamental theme of reformist Buddhist movements.<sup>70</sup> In Myanmar under Prime Minister U Nu, meditation practice was encouraged for both monks and the laity. U Nu was a personal supporter of Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–1982), and invited him to establish a meditation center in Rangoon. With government support the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha Center soon attracted thousands of meditation practitioners from Myanmar and abroad.<sup>71</sup> The Mahasi technique of insight meditation has been taught with great success in Thailand and in Sri Lanka. Burmese meditation teachers in the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition were first invited to Sri Lanka in 1955. George Bond contends that this event helped spark one of the major elements in the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.<sup>72</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, significant changes occurred in Thailand, most notably the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932. At this time two monks, Achan Man Bhuridatta and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, differentially indebted to the forest tradition of Buddhism, began careers that have had a tremendous impact on Thai Buddhism. Achan Man (Mun, 1870–1949) became a noted Thammayut meditation teacher in northeast Thailand.<sup>73</sup> His reputation attracted many disciples who promulgated his teachings and practice in different regions of Thailand, including Achan Li (Lee Dhammadharo, 1907–1961) in central Thailand, Achan Cha Subhaddo (1918–1992) and Achan Mahabua (Boowa) Ñanasampanno (1913–) in the northeast, and Luang Pu Sim Buddhacaro (1909–1992) in the north.<sup>74</sup>

Prior to Achan Man and his teacher, Achan Sao Kantasilo (1861–1941), forest monks in Thailand were noted for their magical powers and lax *vinaya* practice. Achan Sao and Achan Man took the Thammayut scholarship on the dhamma and *vinaya* and the section on the thirteen ascetical practices (*dhutanga*) from Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* and applied them to the life of the forest monk, eschewing magic and adhering to the *vinaya*. They advocated strict observance of the monastic precepts and rigorous meditation practice, which became two major reformist elements of late nineteenth



century Theravada Buddhism together with the belief that nibbana was attainable in the present, a view they also held.

The Achan Man tradition has attracted a wide following in Thailand and beyond. The international monastery built at Achan Cha's *wat* in Ubon Thani has attracted many Westerners. Among the best-known American monks in the Achan Man lineage are: Achan Sumedho, a student of Achan Cha, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, a student of Achan Fuang, who was a disciple of Achan Li.<sup>75</sup> Thanissaro is the abbot of the Metta Forest Monastery in Valley Center, California; Sumedho is abbot of the Amaravati Buddhist Centre in England. The ideal of a simple, ascetical life has also influenced other distinctive movements in contemporary Thai Buddhism, most notably, Santi Asok. The forest ideal also inspired the late Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Thailand's most original and controversial interpreter of the Buddha-dhamma.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) began his monastic career in a conventional manner, but early on he established a forest hermitage near his home of Chaiya in southern Thailand where he adopted a simple lifestyle in emulation of the early Indian Buddhist tradition.<sup>76</sup> Soon after his return to Chaiya from his studies in Bangkok, Buddhadasa's teachings began to be published, initially with the help of his brother, Dhammada, a scholar in his own right. By the 1960s Buddhadasa was recognized as a major interpreter of Theravada Buddhism. Whereas Achan Man's reputation was associated primarily with the path of meditation, Buddhadasa is noted for his innovative scholarship and unique interpretation of the dhamma.

Ordained a monk in 1927, Buddhadasa withdrew from the Thai sangha's system of monastic educational advancement after a frustrating experience in Bangkok with the rigid system of Pali language examinations established by Wachirayan, coupled with city noise and the lifestyle of an urban monastery. He decided that living in the forest and delving deeply into the Pali scriptures on his own would be more conducive to practicing the Buddha's dhamma, and to that end he founded The Garden of Empowering Liberation or Wat Suan Mokkhabalarama, commonly known as Suan Mokkh, located about four kilometers from Chaiya. He writes, "The place for practicing Dhamma



*Figure 3.8. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Wat Suan Mokkhalarama, Chaiya, Thailand, 1976.*

is . . . a matter of great importance. This is because we have to study directly from nature.”<sup>77</sup>

Wat Suan Mokkh has living quarters for monks, accommodations for lay visitors, and an international meditation center. The monks live in adequate but modest wooden structures and engage in some form of manual labor in addition to time spent in meditation and study, rather than chanting at merit-making ceremonies, a practice Buddhadasa deplored. When his health permitted, Buddhadasa lectured regularly at the hermitage. In his early years he spoke at universities and other gatherings of various professional groups, including lawyers and medical practitioners. Many of these talks were recorded and printed to form a part of his collected works.<sup>78</sup>

Certain themes are pivotal to Buddhadasa’s thought, and they include the traditional Theravada teaching of nonattachment, which he relates to

the concepts of not-self (*anatta*), interdependent co-arising (*paticca-samuppada*), and emptiness (*suññata*).<sup>79</sup> He regards essentialism in any form, including language, as obscuring the deeper dhammic meaning of reality. His unconventional, iconoclastic approach to interpreting and propagating Buddha-dhamma from his forest monastery emphasizes the Buddhist principle of impermanence (*anicca*). For Buddhadasa this concept and its corollaries—not-self, interdependent co-arising, and emptiness—are not abstract notions, but have a practical and existential import.

Buddhadasa persistently addressed problems of current political, social, and economic urgency. During the political upheavals of the mid-1970s, topics of his dhamma talks included, “The Kind of Political Reform that Creates Problems” and “Democratic Socialism.” In the face of aggressive economic despoliation of the environment, Buddhadasa was an early advocate for the conservation of nature based on a dhammic biocentrism.<sup>80</sup> Unlike Kitthiwuttho who subordinates Buddhist dhamma to the interests of Thai nationalism, Buddhadasa offers a “spiritual politics” grounded in the central Buddhist teachings of nonattachment and interdependent co-arising (*paticca-samuppada*). He interprets interdependent co-arising to mean mutual balance, a whole composed of interconnected, mutually influencing, and mutually influenced parts. For individuals, it means that one acts in a nonattached manner on behalf of the whole or on behalf of others. This leads to a middle way ethic of sufficiency, adequacy, appropriateness, and normalcy—nothing in excess. When this concept is applied to politics, we have what Buddhadasa characterizes as “spiritual politics,” which is the proper balance among human beings and nature, actions that take into account the interests of the whole as well as the individual parts.

In more practical terms, spiritual politics can be regarded as a kind of socialism, a “fellowship of restraint” (*sangkehom niyom*). For Buddhadasa, socialism as an economic system is inherently better than capitalism, because it is less acquisitive and competitive.<sup>81</sup> However, modern socialism is too materialistic for him; instead he advocates a “spiritual socialism” that must be rooted in the practice of truth (*sila-dhamma*). Its governing principles work for the best balance among individual goods. No policy in one area

should be isolated from policy matters in another. With regard to overpopulation, for example, Buddhadasa argues that population growth must take into account resource use, production, and distribution. He contends that it is possible for the earth to sustain an even larger population, but only if there is an appropriate balance among production, distribution, and use. Buddhadasa concludes that Buddhism's contribution to spiritual politics is to help people see the fundamental interrelatedness of all things.

Most Thais, claims Buddhadasa, believe either that the highest principles of Buddhism demand a separation from the world, or that these principles are too profound to be comprehended by ordinary people. But such is not the case, he argues. The principles of nibbana (i.e., nonattachment) are for everyone, because the state of nonattachment was our original state, and the state we strive to recover from our present unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) condition: "To be nonattached means to be in one's true or original condition—free, at peace, quiet, nonsuffering, totally aware."<sup>82</sup> While some may regard this teaching as being more appropriate for monks than the laity, just the opposite pertains, says Buddhadasa. Laypeople are usually more stressed than monks, and "Those who are hot and bothered need to cool off." It is precisely for this reason that the Buddha taught that emptiness (*suññata*) is the basis for the action of ordinary people.<sup>83</sup> In Buddhadasa's view, emptiness and nonattachment are at the heart of a truly socialistic society where people work for the benefit of the whole and overcome their acquisitive interests.

In the thought and example of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, we see an attempt to emulate the highest teachings of Buddhism and apply them to political and social life to promote interpersonal and civic well-being.<sup>84</sup> He urges a political involvement that is based on dhammic insight, which sees all forms of political, social, and economic organization not as ends in themselves but serving spiritual goals. Buddhadasa also applies Buddhist doctrine to a wide range of social-ethical issues such as the environment. At the heart of his innovative interpretations is the conviction that the transmudane (*lokuttara*) and the mundane (*lokiya*) are essentially intertwined, or as he phrases it in terms having a decided Mahayana epistemic resonance, "*nibbana* is in

*samsara*.” Instead of retreating *from* the world, Buddhadasa’s forest hermitage in southern Thailand is very much *in* the world.

Buddhadasa, despite his influence, has not been without his detractors and critics. From one quarter, his constructive interpretations of Buddhist thought have been criticized as too abstract and impractical; from another quarter, scholarly monks regard his creative reinterpretations as too radical a departure from Pali canonical and commentarial texts. Others accuse Buddhadasa of propagating an eclectic blend of various Buddhisms, especially Zen, and Taoism, while some attack his interpretation of “nature” as an ideal state of peace and harmony. Buddhadasa’s admirers far outnumber his critics, however. His death on July 8, 1993, was an occasion of national mourning, and 2006, the centenary of his birth, was a year-long celebration of his life and teaching that included seminars, lectures, and the addition of several volumes to the corpus of Buddhadasa’s writing published in the multivolume Thammakot (*Dhammakosa*) series. His memory was celebrated by UNESCO on the occasion of his one hundredth natal anniversary and honored with the following citation that appeared in the first of three volumes entitled, “Buddhadasa Has Not Passed Away But Continues to Live,” referring to the lasting presence of his dhamma: “A pioneer in the promotion of the inter-religious understanding through dialogue among people of different faiths, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, a famous Buddhist monk was highly respected worldwide . . . His emphasis on the interdependence of all things made of him a precursor of ecological thought and a champion of peace among nations.”<sup>85</sup>

Buddhadasa’s wide-ranging influence has led Suchira Payulpitack to refer to a “Buddhadasa movement,” which she characterizes as a return to the original meaning of Buddhist doctrine coupled with a strategy to adjust Buddhism to meet the needs of the modern world.<sup>86</sup> Suchira’s statistical data supports Peter Jackson’s socio-political analysis of Thai Buddhism. Jackson sees the rationalistic reformism of Buddhadasa as a vehicle for modern, urbanized politico-religious dissent associated primarily with a university-educated professional class, rather than as a vehicle of middle-class aspirations to which some new religious movements in Thailand appeal.<sup>87</sup>

Buddhadasa did not establish a formal lineage, even though several well-known activist monks who either spent time at Suan Mokkh or who acknowledge Buddhadasa as their *achan* (teacher) could be considered as being in his “lineage.” Among those nationally-known monks, we can cite Phra Phaisan Visalo, whose critical analysis and evaluation of the state of the Thai sangha, in *Phutthasatsana Thai nai anakhot: Naeonom lae thang ok chak wikrit* [The future of Thai Buddhism: trends and a solution to the crisis, 2003], calls for radical sangha reform. Phra Phayom Kalayano, a monk noted as a compelling speaker, created a crisis for the Supreme Sangha Council in 1994 by spearheading an attack on worldliness in the Thai sangha that eventually led to the expulsion of Phra Yantra Amaro.<sup>88</sup> Lay social activist leaders like Sulak Sivaraksa, Dr. Praves Wasi, and Dhammananda Bhikkhuni (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh) are among those who have been influenced by Buddhadasa and are indebted to his modernist interpretation of the Buddha-dhamma.<sup>89</sup>

Santi Asok, a radical sectarian movement in Thailand, indirectly reflects the forest tradition’s ideals of simplicity, and its founder, Phra Phothirak, claims to have been influenced by Buddhadasa, a claim he later recanted.<sup>90</sup> Unlike Achan Man and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Phothirak did not spend his early years as a forest monk, nor did he live in a forest hermitage like Buddhadasa; he was a television entertainer and songwriter. Phothirak was ordained following a conversion experience, which he describes as follows: “At two o’clock in the morning of Tuesday, 17 January 1970, I woke up and walked from my bedroom to the bathroom to relieve myself. Suddenly a brilliant flash occurred within me—a brightness, an openness, and detachment which could not be explained in human terms. I know only that my life opened before me and that the whole world seemed to be revealed.”<sup>91</sup>

Phothirak was ordained in 1970 at Wat Asokaram in the Thammayut sect, but from the very beginning of his monastic career he forged his own way. He developed a following at Wat Asokaram and Wat Mahathat in Bangkok, which he called “the Asoka group.” He soon established a center near Nakhon Pathom about thirty miles from Bangkok, which he named “Asoka’s Land” (Daen Asok) where monks and laypeople, both Thammayut

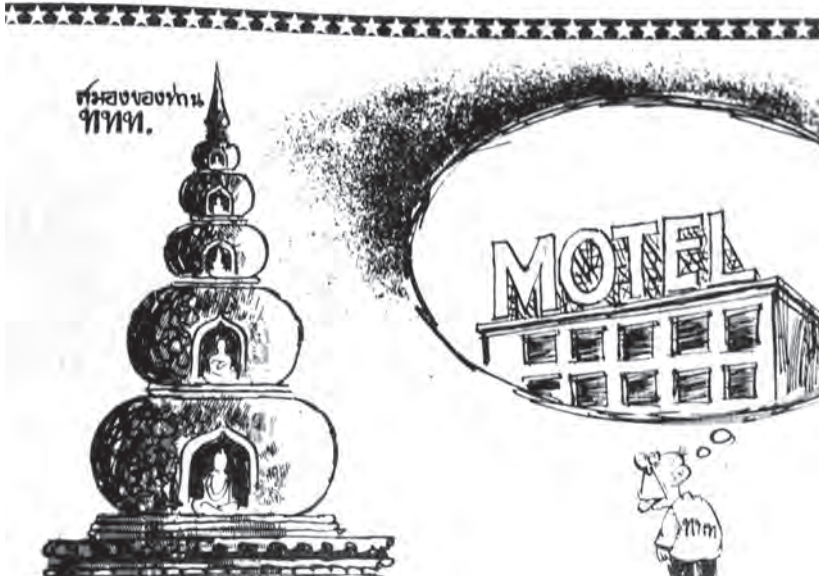


*Figure 3.9. Phothirak,  
founder of Santi Asok.  
Reprinted by permission of  
Santi Asok Foundation.*

and Mahanikai, could practice the dhamma together. When he was forced to disrobe as a Thammayut monk because of his unorthodox activities, he was reordained in the Mahanikai sect in 1973. However, the Thai sangha hierarchy continued to object to his independent ways, and when they ordered him to disband Daen Asok, Phothirak and his fellow monks cut all ties with the national Thai sangha.

Santi Asok continued to grow. The movement established a foundation to manage its many publishing ventures and founded three communities where monks and laity observed a moderately ascetic regime. They live in simple wood and thatch huts, eat one vegetarian meal a day, and eschew intoxicants, stimulants, and tobacco. In over forty years since the founding of Santi Asok, the movement continues to define itself in terms of a simple, disciplined lifestyle reminiscent of the forest tradition ideal. The movement





*Figure 3.10. A Santi Asok publication pokes fun at the Tourist Organization of Thailand for promoting commercial interests at the expense of cultural values.*

has expanded to include nine Asok communities operating under the Asok Sangha Council with approximately eight hundred residents, seven thousand nonresident members, several hundred boarding students, and four lay organizations.<sup>92</sup> Asok communities have been characterized as a radical, conservative Buddhist utopia; an anti-mainstream, counter-state religion; and as an alternative development paradigm of self-reliant communities where both lay and ordained members seek to achieve self-perfection and serve the greater community.<sup>93</sup>

One of Santi Asok's nationally prominent members is a former military general and the ex-mayor of Bangkok, Chamlong Srimuang, a highly visible national politician from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.<sup>94</sup> Elected governor of Bangkok in 1985, he formed the Phalang Tham Party (Power of Dhamma/Moral Force Party) in 1988 with strong connections to Santi Asok. Even though Chamlong was reelected governor of Bangkok in 1990 and in October 1992 was successful in his bid for election as a Bangkok member of parlia-



ment, his political star gradually began to wane following his dramatic hunger strike in May 1992. The hunger strike was an effort to force the resignation of General Suchinda Kraprayoon who had taken over the reins of government in a February 1991 coup d'état. By 1995 Chamlong had resigned as head of the Phalang Tham Party. Leaving his politics aside, Chamlong exemplifies the moral and religious ideals of the Santi Asok movement, and like other Asok members, in his personal lifestyle he applies the ideals represented by the forest tradition to a modern, lay, urban context.

Santi Asok's moral critique of Thai society and laxity in the Thai monastic order appeals to many Thais, but the strident tone of its attacks repels others. Phothirak's outspoken manner, his claims of exalted spiritual attainment, and disregard for Thai ecclesiastical law and *vinaya* rules regarding ordination provoked a committee of senior monks on May 23, 1989, to recommend that he be defrocked by the Supreme Sangha Council (*mahatherasamakhom*) for rebellion against the monastic order.<sup>95</sup> This recommendation was bolstered by criticisms from the highly regarded monk, P. A. Payutto, and respected laypersons.<sup>96</sup> On June 19, 1989, Phothirak and seventy-nine ordained followers were arrested. He was forced to replace the saffron robes of a Thai monk with white robes worn by those who practice a renunciant life but are not official members of the Thai sangha. Several legal proceedings ensued that placed Phothirak in what amounted to legal limbo. In October 1995 the court found him guilty of disobeying the 1989 order of the Supreme Sangha Council to disrobe, and in 1997 an appeals court upheld the Council's decision, sentencing him to six months in prison and two years probation. Despite such a setback, Santi Asok continues to attract adherents, and has even won acceptance by some former prominent critics. As Sanitsuda Ekachai, a well-known editor and columnist of the *Bangkok Post* and social critic observed in regard to the continued appeal of Santi Asok:

What Phothirak . . . has done is offer dissatisfied Buddhists an alternative. In contrast to mainstream monks, Santi Asok disciples follow strict moral discipline, eating only one vegetarian meal a day and living a Spartan life. They also reject object worship and Buddhism by the clergy. While the feudalistic

clergy has lost touch with the world, Santi Asok effectively attracts those disillusioned with materialism by offering them a sense of mission and belonging to a close-knit community.<sup>97</sup>

Santi Asok communities are based on the principle of *bun niyom* or “meritism” in contrast to *thun niyom* or “capitalism.” The differences between the two are shown in the following table.

BUN NIYOM AND THUN NIYOM IN ASOK		
	Thun Niyom	Bun Niyom
1. Characteristic	Endless economic growth	Economic growth in moderation based on religion
2. Objective	Material richness	Spiritual richness
3. Criteria of success	The four dreams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• material riches</li> <li>• worldly position</li> <li>• fame</li> <li>• mundane pleasures</li> </ul>	Free of personal desires of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• material riches</li> <li>• worldly position</li> <li>• fame</li> <li>• mundane pleasures</li> </ul>
4. Ultimate goal	Attachment to material richness	Detachment from material richness
5. Outlook	Big, more, luxurious competition, selfishness	Small, less, simple abundance generosity
6. Activities	Work less, take more administer, control	Work more, take less, manual, participation
7. Effect on the environment	Pollution, destruction of the balance of nature	Protection of the ecological system

Figure 3.11. Reprinted by permission of Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn 1997, 123.

The principle of meritism is embodied in the movement’s slogan, “Consume Little, Work Hard, and Give the Rest to Society.” In a challenge to Max Weber’s ideal-type distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly

asceticism, Asok residents give time and energy for the good of the community, and in turn, their community-wide self-dependent model provides for others outside the Santi Asok community.<sup>98</sup> Asoka residents follow a simple, nonacquisitive lifestyle. Viewing vegetarianism as an expression of adherence to the five precepts, members operate inexpensive vegetarian restaurants and nonprofit markets “to provide the Thai public with low-cost, useful goods” and in so doing they adhere to the principle of *bun niyom*.<sup>99</sup>

During the past century Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia has experienced both doctrinal and institutional reform. Some reforms were promoted by enlightened monarchs such as King Mindon or nurtured by national governments. Other revival movements like the Ramañña Nikaya assumed the form of a new sect or denomination. Over time, some have lost the earlier reformist impetus from which they arose, but not before influencing mainstream traditions. Other reformers have been indebted to the ideals of the forest tradition of early Buddhism, which is perceived as embodying the ideals of an “original” or “pure” Buddhism. In some cases meditation has been the *raison d'être* of the movement (the Mahasi Sayadaw and Achan Man traditions). Others, however, developed primarily as innovative voices for doctrinal and institutional renewal like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu or the radically sectarian Santi Asok movement. Changes in the traditional patterns of monastic education and scholarship have also transformed Buddhist traditions, especially in Sri Lanka and Thailand. P. A. Payutto—abbot, university administrator, and scholar—exemplifies this dimension of modernist reformism in Thailand.

## THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE LAITY

Are Theravada monks in Southeast Asia in danger of losing their distinctiveness and coming to resemble their lay constituents? Perhaps, but it may be equally true that some laypeople are becoming more like monks. At one time the ideal of nibbana and the practice of meditation associated with its attainment were identified almost exclusively with the monastic vocation. Now

this ideal is becoming more a part of lay religious life. Earlier we saw how U Nu encouraged Burmese civil servants to practice meditation. In fact, the impetus for the development of lay meditation centers in Theravada Southeast Asia emanates largely from Myanmar. In this section we shall examine the emergence of lay meditation organizations as one of the distinguishing features of contemporary Theravada Buddhism. This transformation in lay Buddhist practice reflects two historical developments: challenges to the place of the sangha and the role of the monk in society; and the identification of meditation with “authentic” Buddhism.<sup>100</sup>

Another significant development in Theravada countries in the modern period has been the formation of lay Buddhist associations that have partially assumed the social service responsibilities formerly associated with the monastery.<sup>101</sup> In recent years lay Buddhists increasingly have come to define the shape of Buddhist ethical concerns ranging from the place and role of women in the tradition and in society to the destruction of rural habitats and the natural environment by corporate economic interests. Lay Buddhists have also played a major role in shaping an emerging international Buddhism. Each of these topics will be explored in the remainder of this section. They are part and parcel of the most challenging and problematic issues facing Buddhism in the twenty-first century, namely, the respective roles of the monk and the laity and related issues such as the reform of the monastic code.

### Meditation and the Revival of Theravada Buddhism

The practice of meditation has played a central role in the revitalization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand, not only through its association with the reformist monastic traditions but also among the laity. Lay interest in meditation in Myanmar can be traced to four principal factors: Westerners attracted to the practice of insight meditation; the revival of interest in Buddhism as part of the rise of nationalism in the late colonial period; the personal example and encouragement of the prime minister, U Nu; and

the appearance of outstanding monastic and lay meditation teachers who developed simple methods of practice. Three of the best known meditation masters in Burma were two monks, Ledi Sayadaw and Mahasi Sayadaw, and a layman, U Ba Khin.<sup>102</sup> U Nu invited Mahasi Sayadaw to come from Shwebo to Rangoon in 1949 to establish a meditation center, and in December of that year the center was formally opened. Since that time branches have been opened elsewhere in Myanmar and other Theravada countries. The Mahasi Sayadaw's methods of instruction in mindfulness have been published in Burmese, English, and other languages.<sup>103</sup>

U Ba Khin is of special interest, not solely because he was a layman, but also because *vipassana* meditation centers in the United States were founded by Americans who studied with his students. U Ba Khin worked as an accountant general in the Burmese government under U Nu and became an advocate of meditation practice on the basis of his own personal experience. When he was nearly fifty years old, he developed a cancerous growth on the bone and in the tissue immediately below his right eye. After some years of meditation, he claims to have cured himself completely; "To him the moral was obvious; a calm and pure spirit produces a healthy body and furthers efficiency in one's work."<sup>104</sup> To promote these goals he established the International Meditation Center (IMC) in Yangon (Rangoon), which continues to thrive as a center of meditation practice for both Burmese and Western practitioners.

Winston L. King, who spent a ten-day retreat at the IMC in 1960 when U Ba Khin was still alive, described the *guru ji* as "a fascinating combination of worldly wisdom and ingeniousness, inner quiet and outward good humor, efficiency and gentleness, relaxedness and full self-control."<sup>105</sup> The daily schedule at the center was rigorous, beginning with meditation at 4:30 A.M. and alternating two and three-hour periods of meditation with an hour of rest, an hour for breakfast and lunch, and an evening talk by U Ba Khin. King characterized the method as concentration without tension, a middle way between sloth and a focused tension of mind. Although many of his own personal objectives for embarking on this experience were realized, King was unable to decide whether U Ba Khin was "a kind of genius who makes his



*Figure 3.12. Two yogi meditating at the Northern Insight Meditation Center. Wat Rampoeng, Chiang Mai, Thailand.*

‘system’ work or whether he represents an important new type in Burmese Buddhism—the lay teacher who combines meditation and active work in a successful synthesis.”<sup>106</sup> Whatever the nature of his particular genius, U Ba Khin encouraged the practice of meditation as part of the daily routine of Buddhist and non-Buddhist laypersons.

The lay Buddhist meditation movement has been equally important in Sri Lanka and Thailand with both lay and monastic meditation teachers developing sizable followings. In Sri Lanka lay meditation organizations, such as the Saddhamma Friends Society, have been organized specifically to promote meditation among the laity.<sup>107</sup> In Thailand several lay meditation teachers have attracted wide attention, and meditation centers in which monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen practice together have become almost commonplace.

Khun Mae Dr. Siri Krinchai is one example. A schoolteacher by training, after her retirement in the 1980s and 1990s she conducted insight meditation workshops in cities throughout the country. Numbers participating in the workshops ranged from fifty to three hundred.<sup>108</sup> In 1994, she scheduled forty-six workshops in the four major regions of Thailand. Various other centers of meditation practice also attract hundreds of practitioners. Wat Thammakai's popularity stems, in part, from a unique visualization meditation technique promoted as a practice for both monks and laity. In northern Thailand, Wat Rampoeng has become a major meditation center (the Northern Insight Meditation Center, NIMC) attracting, in particular, Thai women. In 2007 a total of 6,259 people participated in *vipassana* meditation training at Wat Rampoeng and of that number, 5,128 were Thai women. In addition, three-day group retreats totaling 7,129 participants were held at a newly constructed meditation center outside the monastery compound. During the nine-year period from 1996 to 2007, Wat Rampoeng attracted approximately 80,000 to its meditation courses, including over 3,000 young men and women from a dozen different countries. In 2007, 421 participated in courses ranging from ten days to several months. Furthermore, twenty branch NIMC centers have been founded in the region.

Wat Rampoeng was built in 1492 as a royal monastery at the foot of Doi Kham Mountain in Chiang Mai.<sup>109</sup> For years the monastery lay abandoned until it was occupied by Japanese troops during World War II. In 1974 the rebuilding of the monastery began, and a year later, a meditation center was established there by Phrakhrū Phiphat Khanaphiban (generally known as Achan Thong), the abbot of Wat Mueang Mang, one of Chiang Mai's oldest monasteries. Achan Thong studied insight meditation in Burma for two years with Mahasi Sayadaw, and then became one of the principal teachers of the Mahasi method of breathing meditation in northern Thailand.<sup>110</sup> Instruction at the Northern Insight Meditation Center under the leadership of the abbot, Phrakhrū Suphan Acinnasilo, is based in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Foundation of Mindfulness Sutta), which focuses on the development of insight in two primary postures, sitting and walking, as well as bowing or prostrating.<sup>111</sup> All meditation practitioners follow the same intensive medita-



tion schedule: 4–6 A.M., 12:00–4 P.M., 5–10 P.M. Most of the practitioner's time is spent in private meditation in addition to one or two daily consultations with a meditation teacher.

In addition to approximately 110 resident monks and novices at Wat Rampoeng, dozens of Thai practitioners, both male and female, reside at the monastery at any given time. The women take either full renunciant vows as *chi* or *mae chi*<sup>112</sup> or ordain as a *yogi*. The *chi* take the eight precepts observed by laity on the Buddhist sabbath days (the five precepts plus abstaining from eating after noon, from entertainment, and from wearing perfume or jewelry), shave their heads and eyebrows, and wear white robes. *Yogi*, both men and women, observe the five precepts and dress in white clothing. As a rule, the women are not required to shave their heads. A German, Maggie Neukirch, was the first Westerner ordained as a *mae chi* at Wat Rampoeng over thirty years ago. Now as a *yogi* she assists the abbot in the instruction of the international meditation students at the Northern Insight Meditation Center. Reflecting on the increasing numbers, both Thai and foreign, involved in the meditation programs at the Northern Insight Meditation Center, she cites these factors: the charisma of Achan Thong, the founder, and the current abbot, Achan Suphan; the quest for spiritual fulfillment in the face of violence, suffering, and materialism; and the global influence of such Buddhist luminaries as the Dalai Lama.

Meditation is also being promoted in Thailand as a treatment for patients with AIDS.<sup>113</sup> Beginning in 1989, a team of psychologists, social workers, and nurses began to utilize meditation techniques as part of a hospital training program for healthcare workers to treat HIV and drug-dependent patients. Trainees participate in a seven-day insight meditation course taught by a skilled meditation teacher. Adhering to the basic principle of insight meditation—to understand the nature of the psycho-physical phenomena taking place in the body—the trainees' practice focuses on becoming as aware as possible of all bodily and mental acts, feelings, and thoughts while sitting, walking, or in other settings. The purpose of the training is to develop patience, self-understanding, concentration, and the qualities of empathy and altruism. The week's training is followed by discussions relating the intensive meditation

experience to cognitive categories at the core of Buddhist mental and moral development, such as mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*karuna*), and equanimity (*upekkha*). The training program concludes with clinical supervision. Results from questionnaires, self-reports, and observations of colleagues show positive results among the majority of health care workers: higher altruism and empathy among trainees; less verbal abuse toward clients; and a greater personal feeling of tranquility, happiness, and patience.<sup>114</sup>

Cumulative evidence from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia supports the view that meditation has been a major factor in the revitalization of Theravada Buddhism in the modern period. This feature of contemporary Buddhism is even more striking when coupled with the resurgence of the forest tradition in its various forms in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand. Three related inferences may be drawn from the modern revival of the monastic forest tradition and lay meditation practice: (1) traditional mainstream, institutional Buddhism is no longer sufficient to define personal meaning and social identity; (2) there is a desire to recapture an enduring core or essential Buddhism in one's personal life; (3) insight meditation, in particular, is less bound to specific cultural forms, and hence, more adaptable to modern settings than other more parochial forms of Buddhist practice.<sup>115</sup> Western Buddhists have also been drawn to the individualistic, adaptable, and non-doctrinaire nature of insight meditation practice.

### Lay Buddhist Movements and Associations

Another major aspect of the changing place of the laity in Theravada Southeast Asia has been the active leadership role undertaken by laymen and laywomen in the formation of various movements and associations devoted to education, public welfare, social service, and political activism. Some groups include monks in their programs, although laypeople usually serve in leadership roles. Several of these movements and associations were established at the turn of the twentieth century and were associated with the revival of Buddhism during the waning days of British colonial power that gave rise to nationalism in

Sri Lanka and Myanmar. D. D. Jayatilaka, one of the early lay leaders in the movement to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka through educational institutions, founded the Young Men's Buddhist Association of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He was principal of two Buddhist colleges in Colombo, Ananda and Dharmaraja, and he served as the general manager of the schools sponsored by the Theosophical Society. The Colombo YMBA continues to sponsor Dhamma Schools and hold Dhamma examinations aimed at providing "the youth of the land with the same standard of religious instruction and Buddhist education as was imparted by the Maha Sangha in the temple schools in times before foreigners destroyed that great national institution."<sup>116</sup> From an initial twenty-seven schools in 1919, fifty years later it had established three thousand educational centers throughout the island.

Other prominent Buddhist lay organizations devoted to various kinds of educational institutions in Sri Lanka and other countries include the Mahabodhi Society, founded by the Anagarika Dharmapala, and the Buddhist Publication Society headquartered in Kandy, Sri Lanka.<sup>117</sup> The latter has been a major publisher and distributor of essays on Theravada doctrine and English translations of Pali *suttas*. Monks from Germany, Great Britain, and the U.S. have made major contributions to the work of the society, notably, the late Nyanaponika Thera, one of the society's founders, and Bhikkhu Bodhi.<sup>118</sup>

Lay Buddhist social service organizations that have been established in Theravada countries since the 1950s function much like lay associations in the West that grew out of religious institutions. Many are national or regional in scope. In Sri Lanka several lay organizations have sponsored social welfare projects. The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress founded in 1919 supports hospital welfare services, orphanages, homes for the elderly and centers for delinquent youth. The Sasana Sevaka Society founded in 1958 to promote the study and promotion of Buddhism has sponsored social services in the areas of poverty alleviation and providing for the homeless. During the past half century, however, the most significant Buddhist social welfare organization in Sri Lanka has been Sarvodaya Shramadana.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana, a rural self-help program begun in the late 1950s, has developed into the most ambitious volunteer service organization in any Theravada Buddhist country. Its training programs and projects in fifteen thousand villages focus on the areas of agriculture, village infrastructure, health, preschool education, and women's health and welfare.<sup>119</sup> A major welfare service organization with 1,500 full time employees and approximately 200,000 volunteers, it cares for over 1,000 orphaned and destitute children, and sponsors 4,335 preschools that serve over 98,000 children (<http://www.sarvodaya.org/about/>). Its founder, A. T. Ariyaratne, states that his efforts are inspired by the Buddha's teaching to strive for awakening. For Ariyaratne the primary meaning of *sarvodaya* is liberation, first from "the defilements within one's own mind . . . and secondly, from unjust and immoral socio-economic chains."<sup>120</sup> Ariyaratne grounds liberation in individual transformation, but he expands the concept to include a universal utopian vision that moves from individual to village, from community to nation, and from nation to the whole world.

Ariyaratne acknowledges his indebtedness to the philosophy of Gandhian nonviolence, especially as mediated through Gandhi's activist disciple, Vinoba Bhave, but more important, the philosophy of Sarvodaya is grounded in basic Theravada teachings: the three characteristics of existence (suffering, impermanence, not-self); the mutually interdependent and co-arising nature of reality; the Noble Eightfold Path encompassing moral virtue, meditation, and wisdom; the mental perfections of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity; and the moral precepts (*sila*). However, Ariyaratne extrapolates classical Buddhist teachings as practical action guides to meet current needs. For example, equanimity (*upekkha*), a mental-affective condition linked with nibbana, is transformed into the ability to look at "both sides of life" rather than primarily as a mental state associated with the attainment of higher states of consciousness.<sup>121</sup> The Four Noble Truths are given social correlates: (1) there is an unproductive village; (2) there is a cause for its lack of productivity; (3) there is hope that the village can be renewed; and (4) there is a way to its renewal.<sup>122</sup> Ariyaratne's interpretation of Buddhism

is an outstanding instance of a modern, reformist tendency to interpret the tradition in pragmatic, ethical terms.

Some Buddhist social activists criticize the Sarvodaya movement for being overly success oriented and dependent on financial support from the government and Western foundations. Yet, Ariyaratne has steadfastly resisted being co-opted by the national government even as support from international NGOs has declined significantly. His refusal to join the Premadasa administration in 1990 prompted the government to attack Sarvodaya's activities, restrict foreign contributions, and threaten Ariyaratne's safety.<sup>123</sup> With Premadasa's death in 1992, Sarvodaya's relationship with the Sri Lankan government improved and the work of the movement continues to expand. Since 1983, the year that marked the beginning of the religiously and ethnically rooted conflict between the Sinhalese (Buddhist) and the Tamils (Hindu), the Sarvodaya movement has directed its attention to the reduction of violence and building a peaceful resolution to ethnic conflict. Sarvodaya's efforts have included staging national peace conferences, leading peace marches, carrying out relief work in war zones, and in constructing a new peace center, Vishva Nektan, in 1997. The center provides a "neutral ground for conflict resolution," training mediators, and studying the causes and dynamics of specific conflict situations.<sup>124</sup>

In Thailand, the driving force behind many NGOs is the controversial social activist and lay Buddhist leader, Sulak Sivaraksa.<sup>125</sup> Sulak launched his career as teacher, intellectual gadfly, moral critic, and Buddhist social activist upon his return from studying in England. He founded several journals including the *Social Science Review* (*Sangkhomsat Parithat*), and *Seeds of Peace*, the English-language publication of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. The organizations that Sulak has founded or assisted in directing include the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD); the Coordinating Group for Religion and Society (CGRS), an ecumenical Buddhist and Christian human rights organization; and the Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development (TICD), which has sought to encourage Buddhist student associations to participate in social service and social change programs, to act as a bridge between rural and urban groups, and to coop-

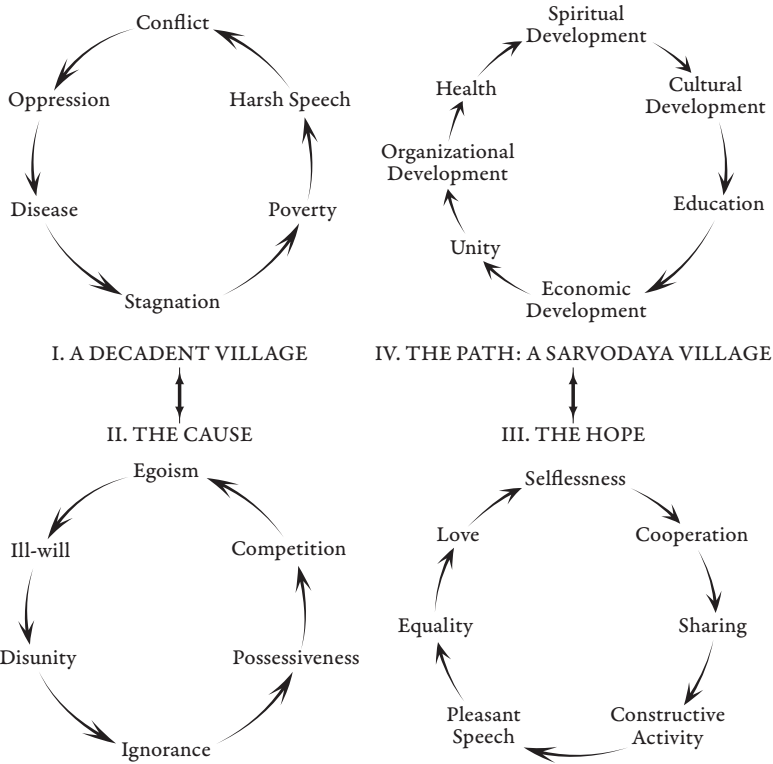


Figure 3.13. *The Sarvodaya Four Noble Truths of Village Awakening. Reprinted by permission of Kumarian Press, Inc.*

erate with various organizations in short-term educational and recreational projects for children in slum areas.

Upon founding the first NGO in the early 1970s, Sulak characterized his Buddhist social activist stance as follows: “Our main objective was to promote idealism among the young so that they would dedicate themselves to work for the people. We tried to revive Buddhist values . . . We [also] felt that the monkhood could play a role again through education and public health . . .”<sup>126</sup> One of the most visible of the NGOs is the Santi (peace) Pracha (democratic participation) Dhamma (justice) Institute (SPDI). Its projects include the Thai Forum Program that provides information to the



*Figure 3.14. Sulak Sivaraksa, Thai Buddhist social activist. Courtesy of INEB.*

mass media on matters of alternative approaches to peace and justice; the Thai-Indochinese Dialogue Project that facilitates dialogue among Thai, Lao, Khmer, and Vietnamese; and Sekiyadhamma, an organization that assists and supports the work of monks dedicated to developing a constructive Buddhist challenge to the rapid destruction of the natural environment and the dissolution of religious and cultural values.<sup>127</sup> The SPDI has been especially active in supporting the efforts of forest conservation monks to challenge the government policy of resettling farmers in northeast Thailand for the purpose of taking over thousands of acres of forest lands assessed by the government as degraded. The philosophical basis for SPDI's approach to its mission is founded on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's holistic vision of spiritual or dhammic socialism.

Sulak is a leader in many ecumenical, international organizations. He serves on several advisory boards including the Society for Buddhist-Chris-

tian Studies, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, the Gandhi Peace Foundation, and he co-founded the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), whose journal, *Seeds of Peace*, is a major publication of the Engaged Buddhist movement. In addition to an annual international conference, INEB sponsors human rights and welfare projects for Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.

Together with A. T. Ariyaratne, Sulak Sivaraksa stands out as one of the most visible international lay Buddhist social activists. Like Ariyaratne, he bases his philosophy of social activism on Buddhist teachings and seeks to reinterpret them in a personal and socially relevant manner. For example, Sulak contemporizes the five precepts as social criticism. He extends the first precept of non-killing to the use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides that deplete the soil of rich microorganisms, the destruction of forests that contributes to a loss of biodiversity, and the contamination caused by the dumping of nuclear and chemical waste. He uses the fourth precept of non-lying to advocate for truth-in-advertising and to expose the mindlessness of commercial television and the sensationalism of newspapers.<sup>128</sup> Not even the sangha is exempt from Sulak's critical eye and pen. In a newspaper article that appeared in the *Bangkok Post*, he applies the traditional monastic vow of chastity to question the increasing affluence of Thai monastic life. He argues that in a consumerist society the endless seeking of sensory pleasures and possessions has become an obsession, whereas Buddhism advocates nonattachment. When a society is driven by lust and greed, Sulak contends, living a chaste life becomes virtually impossible: "Unfortunately, this kind of thinking is also pervasive among monks. They have mistaken a chaste life as meaning only celibacy. Senior monks are then living in luxurious quarters similar to those of millionaires. They are riding in Volvos and Mercedes. They are fiercely competitive. They are strict on rules and forms, which show that they are pure. But their way of life directly violates the pious existence prescribed by Buddha."<sup>129</sup> Although Sulak articulates his philosophy of social action primarily by reinterpreting classical Theravada philosophical and ethical teachings, he is also indebted to other international Buddhist leaders identified with socially engaged Buddhism, in particular, the Vietnamese



Zen monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, and H. H. the Dalai Lama. He also admires Christian liberation theologians and especially the spiritual activism of the American Catholic Trappist monk, the late Thomas Merton.

Sulak's outspoken criticism of the Thai government and Thai society has brought reprisals. In 1984 he was arrested on charges of *lese majeste*, but after serving four months in prison, he was released. In September 1991, the military government, stung by his attacks, again issued a warrant for his arrest on the same charges. Sulak, fearing for his life, fled the country and lived in exile for a year, lecturing in Europe, the United States, and Japan. In August 2006, Sulak was acquitted of the charges that were brought against him in March 1998 for obstructing the construction of the Yadana gas pipeline between Myanmar and Thailand. While Sulak was told that the Royal Household instructed the chief of police to remove the accusation of *lese majeste* against him, pursuant of his criticism of the Thaksin Sinawatra government, he has not been informed officially nor has he received a written reprieve.

Sulak has been attacked not only by military and government leaders, but also he has come under criticism from his own sympathizers who contend that his outspoken style has blunted the effectiveness of his work. Others argue, however, that Sulak's biting sarcasm has allowed other Buddhist social critics speaking in a more moderate voice to be heard. Even his critics acknowledge that S. Sivaraksa has been an effective agent in promoting idealism and public service, revived Buddhist values, and has built cooperative networks of religiously committed and motivated people—clergy and lay, Buddhist and non-Buddhist.

## WOMEN AND BUDDHISM

In Buddhist texts authored by male monastics, women appear positively as female renunciants who attain arahantship and renowned lay women who give generously to the *sangha*, but negatively as a threat to the stability of the male renunciant order and as greedy, weak in wisdom, and inferior to men.<sup>130</sup>

Alan Sponberg has examined a wide range of classical Indian Buddhist texts and gleans from them four diverse attitudes toward women, which he labels as soteriological inclusiveness, institutional androcentrism, ascetic misogyny, and soteriological androgyny.<sup>131</sup> In general, Sponberg opines that while the early Indian Buddhist tradition acknowledged gender differences, it saw them as soteriologically insignificant (i.e., soteriological inclusiveness). As the Buddhist movement became larger and cenobitic monastic traditions became the norm, women's renunciant lives became more and more carefully regulated (institutional androcentrism). As class and caste differences came to be determined by constructions of purity and pollution, women were defined as a threat to the purity of the male monastic vocation (ascetic misogyny). Finally, in the Vajrayana tradition Sponberg contends that gender differences become insignificant relative to the goal, and that ultimately they are perceived as unreal or mutually complementary (soteriological androgyny). While Sponberg's analysis presents only a broad thematic overview, his schema suggests the complexity of the place of women in the Buddhist worldview and the cultural society it reflects.

The Buddhist women's movement in Theravada Buddhism, especially in Thailand and Sri Lanka, has assumed an increasingly important place in the changing role of the laity in the contemporary period. The traditional role of women in Southeast Asian society reflects the values of a patriarchal society. Women's roles were defined primarily by men in relationship to men.<sup>132</sup> The ideal woman was portrayed as a loyal wife and devoted mother. When this portrayal is translated into the Buddhist monastic context, women are seen as mothers who produce sons who become monks, and as homemakers who prepare the food donated to monks. In the legendary story of the life of the Buddha, this latter role is valorized in the person of Sujata, who offers milk and honey-sweetened rice to Prince Siddhattha after he breaks his ascetic fast prior to his enlightenment. In the same legendary life of the Buddha, the earth is portrayed as a goddess who bears witness to the accumulated virtues of the future Buddha. By her witness, she foils the attack by the evil Lord Mara, thereby becoming an instrumental cause of the Buddha's awakening. Other stories in the Pali texts uphold female exemplary donors like Visakha,

as well as men like Anathapindika. These differing images of the feminine in the Pali texts are reflected in the roles played by Buddhist women today in Southeast Asia. For the most part, it is women who provide material support for the male monastic order, especially the preparation and donation of food. Laywomen also serve institutional leadership roles that range from overseeing the preparations for various Buddhist rituals to membership on boards of temples as deacons and trustees. Furthermore, without the participation of women, Buddhist sabbath meetings would be sparsely attended.

Students of Thai Buddhism debate whether or not Buddhism constrains the development of women, devalues them as persons, or is silent when violence is waged against them in ways similar to feminist critiques of Christianity and Judaism. Thomas Kirsch suggests that in Thailand the Theravada worldview both constrains and encourages women to be more worldly and more attached than men to the realm of desire, which hinders the attainment of salvation.<sup>133</sup> Kirsch bases his view, in part, on occupational specialization, for it is the case that women tend to be involved in economic-type activities, such as market vending, which are perceived as being more worldly. Extending this argument, Khin Thitsa contends that it is this “materialistic” image of women that legitimates prostitution as the place where women can best fulfill the role that society expects of them—to support their parents and family.<sup>134</sup> She argues for a direct link between Buddhism and the promotion of wide-scale prostitution in Thailand.

Some critics regard these interpretations as overly simplistic, inadequate, or simply erroneous. Charles F. Keyes counters Kirsch’s view.<sup>135</sup> Relying primarily on sources from popular village traditions, Keyes contends that relative to the dominant Buddhist value of overcoming attachment, women are perceived in a more positive light than men. In his analysis of images of women as mother, suffering lover, and passionate mistress as constructed in Buddhist sermons, popular legends, and courting songs, Keyes argues that women are depicted as being more sensitive to the problem of suffering produced by attachment and, therefore, women naturally embody more positive Buddhist values than do men. Because the natural state of men inclines toward immoral acts, males are required to enter the monastery to be taught

or trained in the very virtues that occur naturally in women. Whether or not Keyes's sympathetic reading of the rural Thai Buddhist tradition is correct, the differing views represented by Kirsch and Khin Thitsa on the one hand, and Keyes on the other regarding the impact of Buddhism on women in Thailand, suggest the difficulty of coming to a definitive conclusion regarding Buddhist influences on the cultural construction of women. In that vein, Penny Van Esterik's richly textured study of Thai constructions of gender cautions against privileging Buddhism either negatively or positively in any interpretation of the place of women in Thai society.<sup>136</sup>

It should be noted that women's roles in Theravada Southeast Asia vary among different cultural environments. In Myanmar, for example, the adolescent rite of passage, exclusively for males in Thailand, is also accorded females, even though the ceremony itself is gender differentiated. Furthermore, although female renunciants (*thilashin*) in Myanmar are technically not nuns (bhikkhuni), they are granted a higher social status and accorded a cultural respect that is missing for their Thai female counterparts (*mae chi*). Not only are their numbers significantly larger, some Burmese nunneries offer highly regarded courses in the Pali scriptures, and *thilashin* are given national honors for high achievement on the Pali exams. Interest in women's renunciant/lay orders of nuns in Sri Lanka (*dasasilamatavas*) and Thailand (*mae chi*) is increasing. In Thailand in the early 1960s a foundation for *mae chi* was established under royal patronage headquartered at the Mahamakut Buddhist University located at Wat Boworniwes, and in 1972 an institute for the purpose of organizing *mae chi* on the national level was established.<sup>137</sup> There are nearly thirteen thousand *mae chi* in Thailand. The three major *mae chi* institutes located in central Thailand are: Wat Boworniwes in Bangkok, Wat Paknam in Thonburi, and the Paktho Institute in Ratchaburi. The largest of these is at Wat Paknam with two hundred and fifty *mae chi* in residence.<sup>138</sup>

Mae Chi Sansanee Sathirasut, Director of Sathira Dhammasathan Institute located in a Bangkok suburb, has achieved national and international fame for her humanitarian work and radiant charisma as a teacher. She co-chairs the Global Initiative of Women, an organization dedicated to interfaith dialogue



*Figure 3.15. Mae Chi Sansanee.  
Courtesy of Sathira Dhammasathan Institute.*

to create world peace, engages with international youth through the Global Young Leaders Alliance, and supervises several ongoing programs at the Sathira Dhammasathan Institute with particular attention to young children, teenagers, and families. A former fashion model before her ordination as a *mae chi*, Sansanee skillfully promotes her projects through the media, which include a live radio program broadcast on Saturday and Sunday, a brief weekly television program, a monthly print publication, *Savika*, a website ([www.sansanee.org](http://www.sansanee.org)), and a DVD entitled, “A Walk of Wisdom.”

It is generally agreed that the tradition of bhikkhuni ordination for women ended in 456 C.E. in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, however, in recent years the bhikkhuni order has been restored in Sri Lanka, and there are efforts underway to inaugurate a female order in Thailand.<sup>139</sup> The first attempt was in 1932 when a monk secretly ordained two women as bhikkhuni. The monk

who was suspected of conducting the ordination was forced to leave the sangha. The Thai monastic order never recognized the ordination as valid, and public pressure eventually forced both women to disrobe. In 1956 Voramai Kabilsingh received the eight precepts of the Thai female renunciant (*mae chi*) from Phra Phrommuni of Wat Boworniwes.<sup>140</sup> To distinguish herself from the usual white-robed *mae chi*, she chose to wear a light yellow robe and referred to herself as a *nak buat* (ordained person). Voramai adopted a strict regime that included continuing the meditation practice she began in 1953 and keeping a strict vegetarian diet. As her reputation spread, a few young women joined her in becoming yellow-robed nuns. In 1957 Voramai purchased land in Nakhon Pathom Province near Bangkok and after a few years opened Wat Songdhammakalyani, the first monastery in Thailand established by and for Buddhist women. The monastery operates a school for orphans, prints its own publications on its printing press, and conducts social service activities for the poor and needy. In 1971 Voramai traveled to Taiwan where she received bhikkhuni ordination in the Dharmagupta tradition; however, her ordination was never recognized by the Thai sangha. Although no Theravada country other than Sri Lanka recognizes the bhikkhuni order, it exists in other Buddhist traditions in Central and East Asia. Furthermore, an increasing number of Western women are being ordained as nuns.

Despite continued resistance, the movement for bhikkhuni ordination is gradually gaining momentum. In August of 1996, a group of Sinhalese women received bhikkhuni ordination at Sarnath, India. In December of 1998, they returned to Sri Lanka at the invitation of the Bhikkhuni Sasano-daya Society, and in that year the Venerable Sumangala of the Siam Nikaya began to ordain women. Voramai Kabilsingh's daughter, Chatsumarn, a highly regarded Buddhist scholar and former chair of the philosophy department at Thammasat University, was ordained a *samaneri* in March 2001, by a chapter of progressive Mahathera monks at Tapodanaramaya, Mount Lavina, Sri Lanka, and two years later on February 28, 2003, received full ordination as a bhikkhuni with the monastic name, Dhammananda. Following in her mother's footsteps, she makes Wat Songdhammakalyani in Nakhon Pathom her center and base for Buddhist women's activities. To date, four other Thai

bhikkhunis and twenty female novices have been ordained in Sri Lanka and Thailand.<sup>141</sup> Even though Dhammananda has received moral support from individual senior Thai monks, her ordination has yet to be recognized as official by the Supreme Sangha Council.

Both lay Buddhist women and nuns are leaders in the international Buddhist women's movement.<sup>142</sup> Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American woman ordained in the Tibetan tradition, is a cofounder of Sakyadhita, the International Association of Buddhist Women. The organization publishes the *Sakyadhita* newsletter and supports the following projects: the Jamyang Foundation educational project for Himalayan women; the Gaden Relief Project in support of the Chuchikjall Nunnery in Ladak; the Sakyapa Nuns' Project in Australia to establish the first Sakyapa nunnery outside of Tibet; and the Kurukulla Center in Boston in support of the Khachoe Ghakyil Nunnery in Nepal.

**Sakyadhita**, the name of the International Association of Buddhist Women, means "Daughters of the Buddha." The objectives of Sakyadhita, as expressed at its founding meeting in 1987 in Bodhgaya, India, are:

- To promote world peace through the practice of the Buddha's Teachings
- To create a network of communications for Buddhist women throughout the world
- To promote harmony and understanding among the various Buddhist traditions
- To encourage and help educate women as teachers of Buddhadharma
- To provide improved facilities for women to study and practice the teachings
- To help establish the Bhikkhuni Sangha where it does not currently exist

Sakyadhita website: [www.sakyadhita.org](http://www.sakyadhita.org)

*Figure 3.16. Objectives of Sakyadhita. From Sakyadhita, International Association of Buddhist Women 4:1 (Winter 1993), 12.*

Lay Buddhist educational, social welfare, and human rights organizations and movements are growing worldwide. Their proliferation reflects the vitality of lay leadership in the revival of Buddhism in the modern period in Southeast Asia, but also underlines the increasing ambiguity of the leadership position of the monk in the Theravada tradition. What justification remains for the monastic order as traditionally defined if laymen and laywomen are able to become meditation teachers and provide the social services once rendered solely by the monastery that once served as the most important organization beyond the family? Can the dominant male character of the monastic order be sustained when it is challenged by respected Buddhist women's organizations? Such questions are both immediate and practical in the Theravada cultures of Buddhist Asia.

### BUDDHISM AND THE WEST

The future of Theravada Buddhism will unfold in the West as well as its natal countries of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, although intercourse between the West and Theravada Buddhist countries is far from new. Travelers' accounts written during the early colonial period often portrayed Buddhism in either unsympathetic or exotic and esoteric terms, however, by the end of the nineteenth century, Western interest in Buddhism had become both intensive and extensive. Westerners made many contributions to Buddhist scholarship, and some took a personal interest in the tradition. T. William and Caroline Rhys Davids founded the Pali Text Society, an organization devoted to editing and translating Pali canonical and commentarial texts. They also helped to found the London Buddhist Society. These early Western Buddhists and sympathetic scholars were responsible for creating and promoting a rationalized, demythologized Buddhism that appeals as much to twenty-first century Europeans and Americans as it does to Western-educated Asians.<sup>143</sup> In this section we shall explore three distinct but related aspects of a new ecumenical Buddhism: the emergence of an international Buddha-dhamma; the popularity of Theravada insight meditation (*vipassana*); and the expansion of expatriate Buddhism.



In 1959 *What the Buddha Taught*, authored by the Sinhalese monk-scholar-educator Walpola Rahula, was published in the West. Soundly grounded in the Pali scriptures, the book discusses such seminal teachings as the Four Noble Truths, not-self, dependent co-arising, meditation, and nibbana. Like D. T. Suzuki's idealistic interpretations of Zen, Rahula's clearly articulated interpretation of Theravada thought is still regarded as a masterpiece of apologetic literature. It presents a rationalized, demythologized version of Buddhism devoid of reference to aspects of popular Buddhist beliefs and practices such as the Buddha cult or merit-making rituals. The Venerable Rahula did not intend for his interpretation of Buddhism to be a comprehensive treatment of the variety of genre in Buddhist literature; rather, *What the Buddha Taught* represents a tradition of modern, rationalist reinterpretations of Theravada doctrine propounded by both Asian Buddhists and Westerners.

A modern, rationalized Buddha-dhamma gauged to appeal to a Western-educated audience has many representatives from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, and the West. Sinhalese scholars have been particularly influential. The late K. N. Jayatilleke of Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka, who studied with Ludwig Wittgenstein, and several of Jayatilleke's students, most notably David J. Kalupahana and Padmasiri de Silva, have written sophisticated interpretations of Buddhist thought in dialogue with modern epistemology, British empiricism, American pragmatism, and Western psychology.<sup>144</sup> Kalupahana argues that the middle way philosophy of early Buddhism was fashioned as a counter to essentialism on the one hand, and nihilism on the other. He contends, furthermore, that the history of Buddhist philosophy—ethics, epistemology, psychology, and logic—has been an endeavor to maintain that middle way. Western philosophers in this tradition find parallels between Humean empiricism and post-modern deconstructionism.<sup>145</sup>

This modernized view of the Buddha-dhamma demythologizes the tradition in the service of ethical and psychological values. Nibbana, for example, is interpreted primarily as a nonattached way of being in the world that affects how we act, rather than as an extraordinary and difficult-to-achieve state of enlightenment. Prince Siddhattha, the mythic hero of the Buddha legend, is transformed into a social critic and moral exemplar.<sup>146</sup> However,

this is not to say that the modernized Buddha-dhamma misinterprets the inherited tradition of Buddhist doctrine, but rather, that the tradition is skillfully reinterpreted to appeal to a rational, Western-educated audience. Although critics have faulted this modernized Buddha-dhamma for its over-emphasis on Buddhism as a philosophical and ethical system while ignoring the rich textures of Buddhist practice and nonphilosophical forms of Buddhist thought, without such reinterpretations, a religious tradition loses its relevance and saliency for the twenty-first century. There is a risk, however, that in the service of rationality and relevance, the varied and challenging complexity of the tradition is ignored or lost.

The sine qua non of Buddhism in the West has been and continues to be the practice of meditation. Beginning with the popularity of Zen Buddhism in America after World War II, and promoted primarily through the writings of D. T. Suzuki and the founding of the early Zen centers in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, meditation has been at the heart of Buddhism's appeal to Westerners. The practice of *zazen* continues to flourish in North America and Europe. With the creation of a Tibetan Buddhist diaspora in the West following the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1958, Tibetan forms of Buddhist meditation as taught by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and interpreted through the *dzogchen* tradition have further expanded the practice of Buddhist meditation.<sup>147</sup>

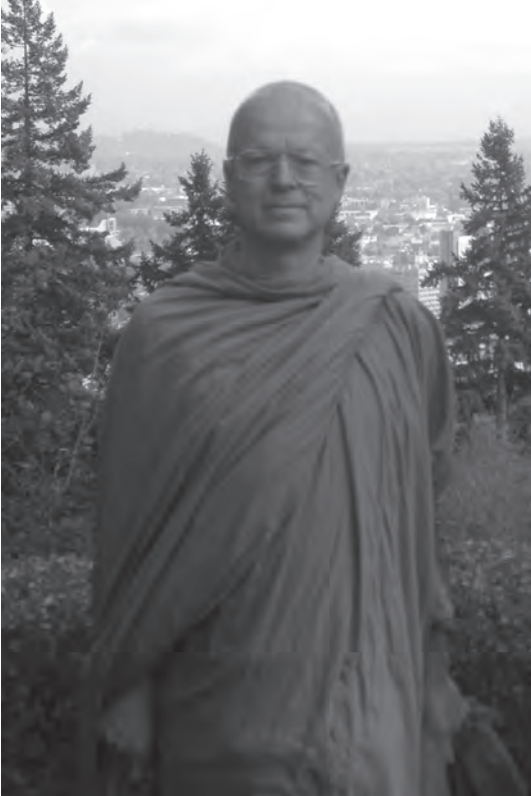
The interest in Theravada insight meditation (*vipassana*) in the United States and the West is a more recent development. The major *vipassana* center in the U.S., the Insight Meditation Society, is located in Barre, Massachusetts, founded by Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, and Sharon Salzberg. Two centers linked to IMS are the Cambridge (Massachusetts) Insight Meditation Center led by Larry Rosenberg, and Spirit Rock in Woodacre, California. Some insight teachers are Asian Buddhist monks; others are American laypersons who have studied with Burmese or Thai meditation teachers, such as Joseph Goldstein of the Barre meditation center; and still others are American monks ordained in Asia who are now teaching in this country, such as Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff), the abbot of the Metta Forest Monastery. Thanissaro and Achan Sumedho, abbot of Amaravati Buddhist

Centre in Hempstead, Hertfordshire, England, were trained in the Thai forest tradition, under Achan Cha and Achan Fuang Jotiko, respectively.<sup>148</sup> Both were granted the authority to ordain by the Thai sangha.

Ordained in Thailand in 1976, Thanissaro studied and practiced under the tutelage of Achan Fuang at Wat Dhammasathit until his teacher's death in 1986. In 1991 he assisted Achan Suwat Suwaco in establishing the Metta Forest Monastery, a Thai monastery near San Diego, California, and in 1993 Thanissaro became its abbot. Thanissaro Bhikkhu occupies a unique niche in the contours of Buddhism in the U.S. between what is called, "immigrant Buddhism," "American Buddhism," or "convert Buddhism." His position, teachings, and writings defy most of the categories devised by scholars to classify types or representations of Buddhism in America.<sup>149</sup>

In December of 2004, the Thai sangha conferred on Thanissaro the ecclesiastical rank of *chao khun*, a rare honor for a non-Thai bhikkhu, in recognition of his scholarly contributions, his leadership of the Metta Forest Monastery, as an *achan* (*acariya*) in the Thai sangha, and as a highly respected monk in the Thai Thammayut order in America. His translations of Pali *suttas* and the writings of seminal figures in the Thai forest tradition have been widely distributed as print publications and are available through the web site: [accesstoinsight](http://accesstoinsight.com). His contributions to Buddhist studies include an anthology of translations from the Pali canon, a translation and interpretation of the monk's disciplinary code, and joint authorship of a major university textbook on Buddhism.<sup>150</sup>

Theravada Buddhism in the West includes forms of American Buddhism associated, in particular, with *vipassana*, as well as an estimated three hundred Thai, Lao, Cambodian, Burmese, and Sri Lankan monasteries in North America. As of this writing, these Buddhist centers minister primarily to the needs of expatriate Southeast Asian populations, many of them originally refugees. Lao and Cambodian monasteries serve as important cultural outposts for those dislocated from their home countries, many of whom experienced untold hardships in their escape from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s.



*Figure 3.17. Thanissaro Bhikhu. Courtesy of Metta Forest Monastery.*

Southeast Asian monasteries in America and the West observe major Buddhist holidays and ceremonies such as Visakha Puja, transporting in memory the participants back to their Thai, Lao, or Cambodian homelands. Classes held in natal languages and the arts, including classical dance, perpetuate Southeast Asian cultural identity in a new environment. Informal counseling on issues ranging from family problems to civil rights teach a variety of coping skills. Above all, these centers honor the Buddha and study his teachings. In the coming decades Theravada Buddhism in America and in the West will inevitably undergo major changes in order to remain relevant to second and third generation immigrant populations. Although Southeast Asian monasteries will continue to serve their Thai, Lao, Cambodian, and Burmese

populations, the greatest challenge will be to adapt to a Western setting that will lead to new and creative forms of religious thought and practice.<sup>151</sup>

## POSTSCRIPT

We have explored Buddhism in Southeast Asia as a dynamic multiplex and multivalent system of thought and practice embedded in the respective cultures, societies, and histories of the region. Such a holistic, multifaceted approach belies the possibility of a grand interpretative theory in terms of which we can easily characterize the nature of Southeast Asian Buddhism or predict its future. Certainly, any interpretation of religion and society in Southeast Asia begs a crucial question. Can or will Theravada Buddhism, which has been such an integral part of the societies of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, be sustained in a form resembling the description given in these pages?

The post-World War II years have brought major changes to much of Southeast Asia, so drastic that the Buddhist worldview and the institutions fostered there are under threat. In Cambodia and Laos, the Buddhist sangha was severely disrupted by the Vietnam War and its aftermath. The sacred monarchical traditions of Southeast Asia traditionally identified with Buddhism and largely undermined during the colonial period, exist only in vague, vestigial forms. Even Thailand's existing monarchy is no longer immune from challenge or criticism.<sup>152</sup> The traditional religious festivals that once shaped community life are gradually losing their importance. A smaller percentage of the male population is being ordained into the Buddhist monkhood. Nevertheless, in much of what remains of rural Southeast Asia, traditional rites, rituals, and festivals continue to bind people together in a common identity; Buddhist values continue to play a normative role in a people's view of social well-being and personal salvation; and Buddhist institutions are making creative adjustments to economic, social, and political changes. Furthermore, new forms of Buddhist thought and practice that are emerging from extensive interaction between Asia and the West, between men and women, between monk and laity hold great promise for the future. Indeed, although the face of Buddhism will reflect its Asian roots, its visage will assume a new aspect, one that is increasingly international and broadly multicultural.

At a symposium on the impact of globalization on Thailand, a professor of Buddhism at Chiang Mai University suggested that while a “global” or “international” Buddhism was philosophically realistic, it would necessarily be culturally impoverished. He concluded his remarks with the question, “Is this really the kind of Buddhism that we would like to have?” At the same symposium, a Thai monk with a doctorate from India suggested an even more distressing possibility. Seeing globalization primarily as the commercialization of culture, a “globalized” Buddhism would inevitably become a religion whose values were determined more by the ideology of commerce than the idioms of the Buddha-dhamma.

These two views offer starkly different visions, one a rationalized, culturally denuded Buddhism taught by philosophers and subject to sloganizing by politicians with little meaning to real-life people in Southeast Asia; the other, a Buddhism overwhelmed by the commercialization of culture, a Buddhism devoid of the power to define or challenge a community’s moral identity or transform individual lives spiritually. As a longtime student of Thai Buddhism, I see and fear the truth of both possibilities; I hope that the reality will be neither.

## APPENDIX I

### *SIGĀLA*KA SUTTA: CODE OF LAY ETHICS

In the *Sigāla*ka Sutta that is found in the Discourses of the Buddha (*Dīgha Nikāya* III.180), the Buddha ethicizes the Brahmanical custom of worshipping the deities of the four cardinal directions, the zenith, and nadir. The Buddha interprets the six directions as metaphors for different social relationships: parents (east); teachers (south); wife and children (west); friends and relatives (north); servants and workers (nadir); brahmins, and mendicants (zenith). The Buddha's moral admonitions may strike us as old-fashioned, but we must keep in mind the historical context—hierarchical and patriarchal—in which they were written. Taking the context into account, one cannot but be impressed with the underlying premise of mutual responsibility for social and moral well-being. The Buddha outlines the duties and obligations as follows.<sup>1</sup>

#### East

Forward direction signifying mother and father whom their children should uphold in five ways: (1) parents have cared for and raised their children, so children should repay this kindness by caring for them; (2) children should help their parents by looking after their affairs; (3) children should ensure the endurance of the family name; (4) children should conduct themselves in ways that make them worthy to receive inherited wealth; (5) after their parents have died, children should make merit on their behalf.

The children's mother and father, having been upheld in the preceding ways, should help their children in five ways by: (1) helping them avoid doing evil; (2) encouraging them to do good; (3) seeing that they receive an education; (4) finding a suitable mate for them; (5) giving them their wealth at the appropriate time.



## South

To the right, signifying the teacher whom the pupil should uphold in five ways by: (1) standing up to receive the teacher (as a sign of respect); (2) waiting in attendance on the teacher; (3) paying attention to what the teacher says; (4) being the teacher's attendant; (5) being a diligent student.

The teacher, having been upheld in these five ways should help students by: (1) setting a good example; (2) motivating the student to study; (3) telling the student as much as the teacher knows without holding anything back; (4) praising the students among their friends; (5) making sure that the students are properly supported and cared for.

## West

Signifying the wife whom her husband should uphold in five ways by: (1) praising her and upholding the relationship; (2) not looking down on her; (3) not being unfaithful; (4) giving her charge of the home and family; (5) giving her clothing and presents.

The husband's wife, having been upheld in these ways, should support her husband by: (1) organizing family affairs well; (2) helping her husband's relatives and friends; (3) not being unfaithful to her husband; (4) looking after the valuables and property; (5) being energetic in her duties.

## North

Signifying friends, good people whom one should uphold in five ways by: (1) sharing things with them; (2) talking agreeably with them; (3) doing useful things for them; (4) being even-minded and without pride; (5) not speaking pretentiously and by being truthful.

One's friends, having been upheld in the preceding ways, should then help as follows by: (1) protecting them from being careless; (2) protecting

their property and valuables if they are careless and neglectful; (3) providing shelter when there is danger; (4) not abandoning them in times of adversity; (5) taking care of the relatives of one's friends.

## Nadir

Signifying servants whom their master should uphold in five ways by: (1) arranging work that is suitable and not beyond their capability; (2) providing them with food and other compensation; (3) taking care of them when they are sick; (4) sharing delicacies with them; (5) giving them time off.

A master's servants, having been upheld in these ways, should help their master by: (1) arising before their master and starting their work; (2) quitting work after their master; (3) not stealing from their master; (4) constantly trying to improve their work; (5) praising the virtues of their master.

## Zenith

Signifying *samana* (religious practitioners) whom their disciples should uphold in five ways by: (1) acting with loving-kindness; (2) speaking with loving-kindness; (3) thinking thoughts with loving-kindness; (4) always welcoming them into their homes; (5) providing them with material requisites.

*Samanas*, having been upheld in these ways, should then assist their followers by: (1) helping them avoid evil; (2) encouraging them to do the good; (3) helping them with a compassionate mind; (4) teaching them what they do not know; (5) clarifying for them what they might know already.

## APPENDIX 2

### BOROBUDUR

The pyramidal terrace known as Borobudur was constructed on the Kedu Plain near Jogjakarta between 760 and 830 C.E. by the ruling Sailendra (“kings of the mountain”) dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Under King Sumaratunga (792–824), the Sailendras controlled most of central Java and enjoyed especially close relations with the Pala kings of north India, who were patrons of Mahayana and Tantrayana forms of Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> Borobudur, the only surviving monument of its type in Java, embodies a set of complex meanings: “The monument has multiple layers of meaning which accumulated during its active life, and it therefore represents a process of cultural evolution rather than a single moment in Javanese history.”<sup>3</sup> Interpretations variously identify Borobudur as a cosmic mountain, a stupa,<sup>4</sup> a *mandala*, or the stages of development of a spiritual journey.<sup>5</sup>

The structure consists of six square terraces, the lowest being 479 square feet, topped by three circular platforms bearing seventy-two perforated, hollow stupas covering seated Buddha images and a solid central stupa fifty-two feet in diameter.<sup>6</sup> The walls of the terraces and the lower foundation are covered with bas-reliefs. The ground level is designed to illustrate the operation of kamma and rebirth, depicting in graphic detail the punishments that result from evil deeds. The terraces are for perambulation. Here bas-reliefs carved in stone depict the life of the Buddha according to the *Lalitavistara*, and stories from the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Jātakamālā*, and the *Gaṇdhavyūha*. A total of ninety-two Buddha images are situated in niches on the outer gallery walls of the monument’s five levels.

Borobudur’s terraced pyramid appears to represent a spiritual ascent or journey from the mundane world of karmic action and rebirth to that supreme reality beyond all form. Along the ascending path, pilgrims encounter the Buddha Sakyamuni and Mahayana *bodhisattvas* carved in bas-relief on the circumambulatory terraces. Borobudur can be constructed in ways other than mapping stages of a spiritual journey. Paul Mus sees the monument as

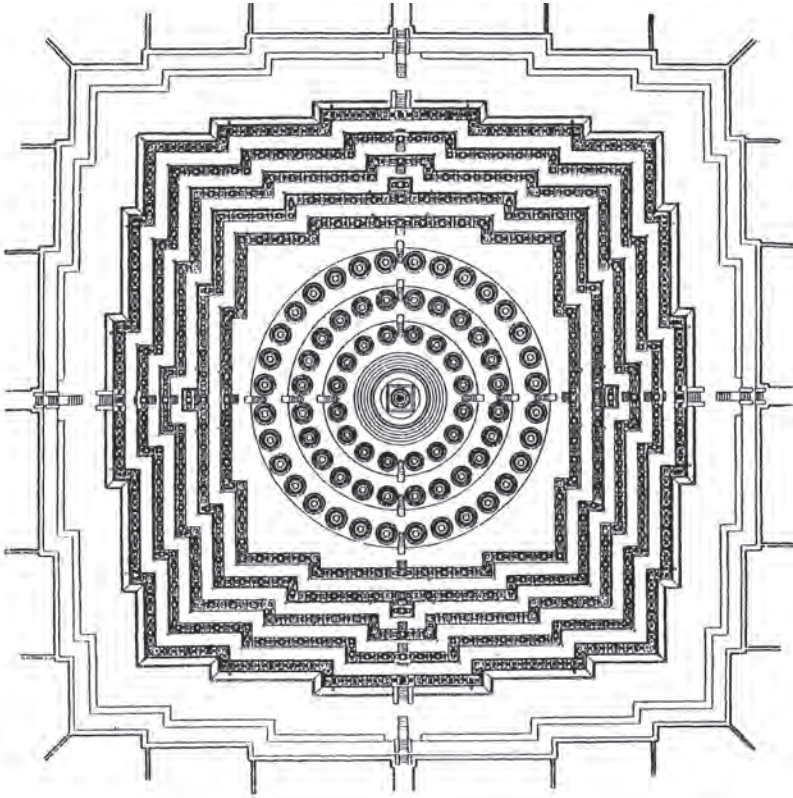


Figure A.1. Top view of Borobudur. From A. J. Bernet Kempers, *Ancient Indonesian Art*. Harvard University Press, 1959, 42. Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press.

a representation of the upper reaches of a cosmic mountain enclosed by the cupola of the sky.<sup>7</sup> As a cosmic mountain or *axis mundi*, it serves to connect the divine source of royal power with the Buddha. From this perspective, Borobudur has been interpreted as merging a chthonous cult of “kings of the mountain” with the Buddha Vairocana, the universal, unconditioned Adi-Buddha. J. G. De Casparis argues that in Sailendra inscriptions the Sanskrit term, *gotra*, was used to refer to the fundamental element of Buddhahood as well as the “line of the ancestors,” thereby linking the family of the Tathagata with the Sailendra ancestral line.<sup>8</sup> R. Soekmono agrees with the underlying assumption of this view when he contends that a stepped pyramid crowned

by a stupa is the most appropriate symbol to depict the virtues successively accumulated by the lineage of forebears along the *bodhisattva* path to Buddhahood.<sup>9</sup>

Although scholarly interpretations of Borobudur differ, there does seem to be a general consensus that the monument integrates three levels of meaning germane to our study of the symbiosis between political authority and cosmology, namely, cosmic, royal, and Buddhist. At the macrocosmic level, the monument connects royal power with the universal Buddha at the center of a complex cosmology; at the microcosmic level, Borobudur represents stages of spiritual ascent from the realm of desire, through the realm of form, and finally to the realm beyond form, or—in terms more specifically related to kingship—Borobudur represents stages of *bodhisattva* perfection, not only to the unconditioned ground of reality, but also to the foundation of the royal Sailendra lineage.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

### Preface

1. For a more detailed discussion of the development of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, see Donald K. Swearer, "Buddhism in Southeast Asia," in vol. 2 of *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 385–400. This article was reprinted in Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mark D. Cummings, eds., *The Religious Traditions of Asia* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989); and Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mark D. Cummings, eds., *Buddhism and Asian History* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989). For a discussion of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka and its legacy in India, see Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988).

Students unfamiliar with the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism can consult K. R. Norman, *Pali Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983). The Pali canon and a number of Pali commentaries have been edited and published by the Pali Text Society. Many volumes are available in English in the Pali Text Society Translation Series. Recent English translations of the Long Discourses of the Buddha (*Dīgha Nikāya*) and the Middle Length Discourses (*Majjhima Nikāya*) are Maurice Walshe, trans., *Thus I Have Heard. The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987); and Bhikkhu Ñanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

2. Current scholarly convention uses *Tai* or *Dai* as a collective term for various Tai ethnic groups, such as the Shan of Burma, the Lue, the Khoen, and the Yuan. I use, Thai, when referring to the Thais of modern Thailand.

3. See the introduction in Patrick Henry and Donald K. Swearer, *For the Sake of the World: The Spirit of Buddhist and Christian Monasticism* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg-Fortress Press; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1989), for a discussion on the use of the terms *monk* and *nun*.

## Introduction

1. I use the terms *ethos* and *worldview* in the sense defined by Clifford Geertz in his article, "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 127: "A people's ethos is the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. Their worldview is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order."

## Part I. The Popular Tradition

1. I shall use Burma as the country name in historical references and citations, and Myanmar in other instances.

2. For the most part, Buddhist terms will appear in their Pali form, the scriptural language of Theravada Buddhism. When the context demands, Sanskrit or a vernacular term will be used. For Thai words, I follow the transliteration system of the Royal Institute. Widely known Pali and Sanskrit terms used frequently in this monograph are not italicized: bhikkhu, bhikkuni, dharma, dhamma, karma, kamma, mantra, nibbana, nirvana, sangha, stupa. In the interest of non-specialist readers, Pali and Sanskrit diacritics have been omitted except where they appear in titles, texts, quoted material, and glossary terms. The one exception is "ñ" instead of "ny."

3. See Max Weber, *The Religions of India*, trans. and ed. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: The Free Press, 1958), chaps. 6–7.

4. For example, see Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). For an analysis of Burmese Buddhist ethics, see Winston L. King, *In the Hope of Nibbana: An Essay on Theravada Buddhist Ethics* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1964). For a critique of Spiro and King, see Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), chap. 4.

5. For a critical analysis of the concept of the Pali canon, see Steven Collins, "The Very Idea of a Pali Canon," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15 (1990): 89–126.

6. For Buddhist attitudes toward wealth, see Russell Sizemore and Donald K. Swearer, eds., *Ethics, Wealth and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990).

7. For a discussion of this issue, see Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pt. 1.

8. The *jatakas* were written as stories of the Buddha's previous lives. Because they are examples of how folk traditions became incorporated into a set form and are linked by the *bodhisatta* concept, they provide a rich textual resource for the popular tradition of Indian Buddhism. In addition to the Pali *jatakas*, there is an extensive vernacular *jataka* tradition, among them the *Paññasa Jātaka* (Fifty Jatakas) written in northern Thailand. See I. B. Horner, and Padmanabh S. Jaini, trans., *Apocryphal Birth-Stories (Paññāsa Jātaka)*, 2 vols. (London: Pali Text Society, 1985–86). The specific perfections as represented in the last ten *jataka* tales are: renunciation, loving-kindness, effort, determination, wisdom, forbearance, truthfulness, good conduct, equanimity, and generosity.

9. In the interest of simplicity, I have disregarded the distinctions between stupa, *cetiya*, and *dhatugarbha* (Sinhalese, *dagoba*). See part 2 for a discussion of the stupa. The solid dome or pyramidal architectural structures to which these terms refer embody both a cosmic referent (*axis mundi*) and a Buddhist referent. The latter derives from the fact that these structures enshrine a material artifact—although not always a bodily relic—associated with the person and life of the Buddha or a Buddhist saint.

10. For a discussion of the supreme saintly ideal in Theravada Buddhism, see George D. Bond, "The Arahant: Sainthood in Theravada Buddhism," in *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, ed. Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 140–71. See also Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Buddhist Arahant: Classical Paradigm and Modern Thai Manifestations," in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John S. Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 111–26.

11. Margaret Cone and Richard Gombrich, *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977). For a discussion of the Vessantara murals in Thailand, see Forrest McGill, "Painting the 'Great Life,'" in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 195–217. For a critical analysis of the *Vessantara Jātaka*, see Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 7; see also, Louis Gabaude, "Controverses modernes autour du Vessantara



Jātaka,” *Cahiers de l’Asie du Sud-Est*, no. 29–30 (1991); and Sanitsuda Ekachai, “Madsī: A Female Bodhisattva,” in *Keeping the Faith: Thai Buddhism at the Crossroads*, ed. Nick Wilgus (Bangkok: Post Books, 2001): 197–202, for a gender critique of Vessantara.

12. Although the theological contexts are different, there are structural parallels between the story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, found in the Hebrew scriptures and Vessantara’s willingness to sacrifice his family.

13. Steven Collins, in *Selfless Persons*, provides a detailed analysis of the not-self doctrine in the Pali scriptures and its implications for Buddhist institutional life and practice.

14. Ranjini Obeyesekere, trans., *Yasodaravata: The Story of Yasodara or Yasodara’s Lament* (Colombo: Godage International Publishers, Ltd., 2005). For a northern Thai version of the same story, see Donald K. Swearer, trans., “Bimba’s Lament,” in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 541–52.

15. See Alan Sponberg, “Attitudes Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 3–36.

16. See Nancy Auer Falk, “Exemplary Donors of the Pali Tradition,” in *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics*, ed. Russell F. Sizemore and Donald K. Swearer (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 124–43.

17. Susan Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), 50–51. For another translation, see C. A. F. Rhys Davids and K. R. Norman, trans., *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns (Therīgāthā)*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1989), 49.

18. For sources about Mahasi Sayadaw, see Ashin Silanandabhivamsa, *The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw Biography*, abridged ed., trans. U Min Swe, pt. 1 (Rangoon: Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Organization, 1982); Mahasi Sayadaw, *The Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā Meditation*, trans. U Pe Thin (Rangoon: Department of Religious Affairs, 1979); Mahasi Sayadaw, *The Progress of Insight*, trans. Nyanaponika Thera (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1965). For an analysis of the biography of U Ba Khin, see Gustaaf Houtman, “The Biography of Modern Burmese Buddhist Meditation Master U Ba Khin: Life before the Cradle and past the Grave,” in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997), 310–44.

19. Michael Carrithers, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 70.

20. Maha Boowa Nanasampanno, *Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera*, trans. Bhikhu Dick Silaranto (Udon Thani, Thailand: Wat Pa Baan Taad, 2003). For accounts of Thai forest monks, see Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth-Century Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997); and Kamala Tiyavanich, *The Buddha in the Jungle* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003). For interpretations of the tradition of forest monks, see Stanley J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism, and Millennial Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); James L. Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State: An Anthropological and Historical Study in Northeastern Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).

21. James L. Taylor, "The Textualization of a Monastic Tradition: Forest Monks, Lineage, and the Biographical Process in Thailand," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 289–309.

22. See Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, pt. 3. An influential study of the cult of saints in the Christian tradition is Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

23. John Van Esterik, "Women Meditation Teachers in Thailand," in *Women of Southeast Asia*, ed. Penny Van Esterik (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1996), 36.

24. Tan Acharn Kor Khao-suan-luang, *Looking Inward: Observations on the Art of Meditation* (Bangkok: P. Samphanpanich Ltd., n.d.), 54. For a different translation, see Tan Acharn Kor Khao-suan-luang, *Looking Inward: Observations on the Art of Meditation*, Wheel Publication, no. 373–374 (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1991). See also, Tan Acharn Kor Khao-suan-luang, *Directing to Self Penetration: Six Dhamma Talks About Centering the Mind in Non-attachment* (Bangkok: Chuan Press Ltd., 1984).

25. For a discussion of Devadatta, see Edward J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha in Legend and History*, 3d ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), 131ff.

26. Bonnie Pacala Brereton, *Thai Tellings of Phra Malai: Texts and Rituals Concerning a Popular Buddhist Saint* (Tempe: Arizona State University Press, 1995).

27. See Robin Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds, *Cosmology and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), especially the introduction and chap. 8.

28. I. B. Horner, trans., Basket of Conduct (*Cariyāpiṭaka*), in *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon*, part 3 (London: Pali Text Society, 1975), 22–23.
29. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 191–92.
30. *Ibid.*, 192.
31. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, pt. 3.
32. For example, see Michael Ames, “Magical-Animism and Buddhism: A Structural Analysis of the Sinhalese Religious System,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 23 (June 1964): 21–52.
33. Gananath Obeyesekere, “The Buddhist Pantheon in Ceylon and Its Extensions,” in *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism*, ed. Manning Nash (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1966), 1–26; John C. Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
34. Melford Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism: A Study in the Explanation and Reduction of Suffering* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967).
35. See Stanley J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Marcel Zago, *Rites et Ceremonies en Milieu Bouddhiste Lao* (Roma: Universita Gregoriana Editrice, 1972).
36. For a discussion of the historical formation and use of the *paritta* in Sri Lanka, see Lily de Silva, “The Paritta Ceremony of Sri Lanka: Its Antiquity and Symbolism,” in *Buddhist Thought and Ritual*, ed. David J. Kalupahana (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 139–50; and Hammalawa Saddhatissa, “The Significance of Paritta and Its Application in the Theravāda Tradition,” in *Buddhist Thought and Ritual*, ed. David J. Kalupahana (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 125–38.
37. Maria Heim, *Theories of the Gift in South Asia: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Reflections on Dāna* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); Reiko Ohnuma, “Gift,” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
38. H. S. Gehman, trans., “Petavatthu: Stories of the Departed,” in *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon*, part 4 (London: Pali Text Society, 1974), 5.
39. *Ibid.*, 27–28.
40. This basic pattern of reciprocity may reflect an ancient Vedic notion of sacrificial efficacy in which Brahman priests make an offering to a deity on behalf of lay patrons or sponsors to secure for them a benefit or boon.

41. The literal meaning of *kathina* is “frame.” Originally, monks would take the cloth received on this particular day and stretch it on a frame (much like a quilting frame), and working jointly, stitch the pieces together. In northern Thailand this custom is still observed, but it has become a rare occasion.

42. See Sukumar Dutt, *The Buddha and Five After-Centuries* (London: Luzac and Company, 1957) for a discussion of this transformation of monastic life and practice.

43. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, 158.

44. Adapted from *A Manual of Buddhist Chants and Ordination Procedures* (Chicago: Wat Dhammarama Press, 1993), 60–61.

45. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 301.

46. For a more extensive description and analysis of the Buddha image consecration ceremony in northern Thailand, see Donald K. Swearer, “Hypostasizing the Buddha: Buddha Image Consecration in Northern Thailand,” *History of Religions* 34, no. 3 (February 1995); and Donald K. Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004). For Sri Lanka, see Richard F. Gombrich, “The Consecration of a Buddha Image,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (November 1966); and for Cambodia, see François Bizot, “La consécration des statues et le culte des morts,” in *Recherches nouvelles sur le Cambodge*, ed. François Bizot (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1994).

47. For a broad, psychologically nuanced, comparative study of the power of images, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

48. Piyadassi Thera, trans., and introduction to *The Book of Protection (Paritta)* (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1975), 5.

49. *Ibid.*, 12.

50. *Ibid.*, 14–17.

51. N. A. Jayawickrama, trans., *The Story of Gotama Buddha: the Nidāna-kathā of the Jātakāthakathā* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society), 1990.

52. Shway Yoe [Sir James George Scott], *The Burman: His Life and Notions* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), 336–37.

53. Informants also interpret the three knowledges as the Buddha’s omniscience, that is, knowledge of the past, present, and future.

54. Narada Thera, trans., *The Dhammapada* (London: J. Murray, 1954), 46.

55. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, 2d ed. (1908; reprint, New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 71.
56. Gombrich and Obeyesekere regard the introduction of Buddhist *sacralia* into the Sri Lankan wedding ceremony as a sign of the “embourgeoisement” of this rite. See Richard F. Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 255–73.
57. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, 160.
58. Scholars have argued that the consequentialist view of the efficacy of ritual action in Buddhism is a Brahmanical influence with roots in the intentionality of the Vedic ritual sacrifice, wherein ritual offerings obligate the deities to act on behalf of the sponsor of the sacrifice.
59. Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *The Maha Chat Ceremony* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1969); G. E. Gerini, *A Retrospective View and Account of the Origin of the Thet Mahā Chāt Ceremony (Mahā Jāti Desanā) or Exposition of the Tale of the Great Birth as Performed in Siam*, 2d ed. (Bangkok: Santhirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 1976); Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, 160–68. My description also includes my field notes from observations of the ceremony in 1976 and 1989.
60. Sanguan Chotisukharat, *Prapheni Thai Phak Nuea* [The customs of northern Thailand] (Bangkok: Odian, 2512 B.E. / 1969 C.E.), 125 ff.
61. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, 153. For a discussion of Buddhist holidays in Laos, see René de Berval, *Kingdom of Laos: The Land of a Million Elephants and of the White Parasols*, trans. Teissier du Cros (Saigon: France-Asie, 1959).
62. Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 350–51.
63. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 200.
64. The story is found in John Hoskin and Geoffrey Walton, eds., *Folk Tales and Legends of the Dai People*, trans. Ying Yi (from the Chinese) (Bangkok: DD Books, 1992), 10–12.
65. *Ibid.*, 10.
66. *Ibid.*, 12.
67. The definitive study of the sand mountain in Laos and Thailand is Louis Gabaude, *Les ceitya de sable au Laos et en Thaïlande* (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1979). According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Thais believe that the purpose of the sand mountain is to replenish the soil worn away during the preceding year. Pious Thais fear appropriating even the smallest amount of monastic property, including sand.

68. Sanguan Chotisukharat, *Prapheni Thai Phak Nuea*, 6.
69. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest*, 230–42.
70. Adapted from Plaek Santhirak, *Latthi Prapheni lae Phithikam* [Beliefs, customs, and merit-making ceremonies] (Bangkok: Pannakhan, 1972), 302ff. Bumphen Rawin edited the northern Thai version of the *Pathamasambodhi*, which probably was written in Chiang Mai in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. See Bumphen Rawin, *Pathomsomphot Samnuan Lanna* [The northern Thai version of the Buddha's first enlightenment] (Bangkok: Odian Store, 2535 B.E. / 1992 C.E.). Two nineteenth century Thai versions are: Kromsomdet Phra Paramanuchit-chinorot (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, 1960) and Somdet Phrasangharaja Sa Pussadeva, *Pathomsomphot Katha* [The Buddha's first enlightenment] (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University, 1985). A major contribution to our understanding of the development of Buddha biography would be a comparison of the *Nidānakathā*, the *Lalitavistara*, the *Buddhacarita*, and the *Pathomsomphot Katha*.
71. Donald K. Swearer, *Wat Haripunjaya: A Study of the Royal Temple of the Buddha's Relic, Lamphun, Thailand*, AAR Studies in Religion, no. 10 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars' Press, 1976), chap. 3.
72. The *Loi Krathong* celebration in northern Thailand is well known. Even though it has become overly commercialized in Chiang Mai, in smaller towns the quiet beauty of candlelit *krathongs* floating on the northern rivers and the community spirit experienced in the celebration make it a particularly delightful observance.
73. Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Essays on Thai Folklore* (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1968), 39.
74. Kenneth E. Wells, *Thai Buddhism: Its Rites and Activities*, rev. ed. (Bangkok: Suriyabun Publishers, 1975), 114. For a discussion of the cult of Upagutta (Sanskrit, Upagupta) in Southeast Asia, see John S. Strong, *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).
75. Singkha Wannasi, *Prapheni Lae Ngan Nakkhattaruek Haeng Lanna Thai* [Customs and astrological celebrations of the northern Thai] (mimeograph, n.d.), 1.
76. Wells, *Thai Buddhism*, 142.
77. See Charles F. Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977; Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995) for a discussion of the afterbirth ritual of "lying by the fire."
78. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, 192.

79. Originally, there was a bhikkhuni order in India and Sri Lanka that eventually died out. Because today there is no longer a bhikkhuni sangha in Theravada Southeast Asia, it would be misleading to consider entrance into the monastic order as being inclusive of both men and women. Consequently, the following discussion of ordination deals primarily with male initiation. Women renunciants will be discussed in part 3 in conjunction with the changing roles of monk and laity.

80. Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India: Their History and Contribution to Indian Culture* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1962), 36. For a description of an ordination ritual, see Henry C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 393–401. For a description of Theravada monastic life, see Mohan Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life*, trans. Claude Grangier and Steven Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

81. This passage is from the *bhikkhu vagga* chapter of the *Dhammapada*.

82. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 322–38. It is not surprising that Spiro's analysis of the motivational structure of monastic recruitment in Burma was not well received in that country.

83. David K. Wyatt, "The Buddhist Monkhood as an Avenue of Social Mobility in Traditional Thai Society," in *Studies in Thai History*, ed. David K. Wyatt (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books, 1994).

84. This pattern also reflects the Hindu *brahmacari* stage of life.

85. See Charles F. Keyes, "Mother, Mistress, but Never a Monk: Buddhist Notions of Female Gender in Rural Thailand," *American Ethnologist* 11, no. 2 (May 1984): 223–41.

86. Donald K. Swearer, "The Layman Extraordinaire in Northern Thai Buddhism," *Journal of the Siam Society* 64, no. 1 (January 1976): 151–68.

87. Charles F. Keyes, "Ambiguous Gender: Male Initiation in Northern Thai Buddhist Society," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Carolyn Walker Bynum et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 66–96.

88. Wells, *Thai Buddhism*, 214–15.

89. For a description of a Theravada ordination in Sri Lanka, see Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, 393–401. See also Vajirañanavarorasa, *Entrance to the Vinaya* (Bangkok: Mahamakuta University, 1960).

90. Sponberg analyzes four types of attitudes toward women in the Buddhist tradition in his essay, "Attitudes Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism."

91. Ingrid Jordt, "Bhikkhuni, Thilashin, Mae-Chii: Women Who Renounce the World in Burma, Thailand and the Classical Buddhist Texts," *Crossroads* 4, no. 1 (fall 1988): 31. Feminist studies have contributed to a growing literature on issues of women, sexuality, and gender in Buddhism. For example, see José Ignacio Cabezón, ed. *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

92. For a description of renunciant women's groups in Thailand, see Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991).

93. Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, 57.

94. Gombrich and Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*.

95. Adapted from Piyadassi Thera, trans., *The Book of Protection*, 29–30. In 1991, I attended a unique Buddhist-Christian wedding held in the Wellesley Congregational Church (Wellesley, Mass.) The groom was a Burmese and the bride was the daughter of the pastor of the church. Burmese monks led the first half of the ceremony in which they chanted the *Maṅgala Sutta* in Pali.

96. Sanguan Chotisukharat, *Prapbeni Thai Phak Nuea*, 53–61; Mani Phayomyong, *Prapbeni Sipsong Duean Lanna Thai* [The twelve month customs of northern Thailand], vol. 1 (Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University, 2529 B.E. / 1986 C.E.), 89–101.

97. The number 108 is the multiple of the square of 1, 2, and 3.

98. For example, see Shway Yoe, *The Burman*, chap. 64; Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, chap. 11.

99. Konrad Kingshill, *Ku Daeng-The Red Tomb: A Village Study in Northern Thailand*, 3d ed., rev. (Bangkok: Suriyaban Publishers, 1976), 206–24.

100. Wells, *Thai Buddhism: Its Rites and Activities*, 214–15.

101. Kingshill, *Ku Daeng*, 212.

102. Customarily, Thai people sleep with their heads to the east, the direction of life. Buddhist temples also face the east.

103. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, 180.

104. Kingshill, *Ku Daeng*, 223.

## Part II. Buddhism and the State

1. For example, see Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka* (Chambersburg, Pa.: Anima Books, 1978); Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Religion and*



*Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma* (Chambersburg, Pa: Anima Books, 1978); Manuel Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965); Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society: Thai Buddhism in History*, trans. Peter Hawkes (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986); Trevor Ling, *Buddhism, Imperialism and War: Burma and Thailand in Modern History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979); Heinz Bechert, "Aspects of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia," in *The Buddhist Heritage*, ed. T. Skorupski (Trink, U.K.: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989); George D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), chap. 1–3; Charles F. Keyes, "Communist Revolution and the Buddhist Past in Cambodia," in *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Charles F. Keyes et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994); Ian Harris, ed., *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia* (London: Pinter, 1999); H. L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Ananda Abeysekera, *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity, and Difference* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002); Ian Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); Michael A. Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña: The Legend That Was Lower Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005). With a few exceptions, transliterations of Burmese and Thai place names and proper names follow generally accepted usage, for example, Sukhothai rather than Sukhodaya.

2. Bechert, "Aspects of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia," 20–21. The concept of the *devaraja* as the apotheosis of a human being is still a matter of scholarly debate.
3. The Pali words for the ten royal virtues are *dana*, *sila*, *pariccaga*, *ajjava*, *maddava*, *tapa*, *akkodha*, *abimsa*, *khanti*, *avirodhana*. See *Jātaka* v.378.
4. See John Irwin, "Asokan' Pillars: A Reassessment of Evidence," *Burlington Magazine* 115 (November 1973): 706–22. Irwin argues that the so-called Asokan or Mauryan pillars, the earliest surviving stone monuments in India, are pre-Mauryan in their architectural form. He contends, furthermore, that the pillars were fundamentally religious in nature rather than imperial or secular, and that the main symbolic function of the pillars was "to serve as an esoteric link between the Waters of Creation in the netherworld and the celestial sphere above"

(720). Irwin speculates, therefore, that the primordial meaning of the pillar, later appropriated by Asoka, was an Indian variant of an *axis mundi* cosmology. This theory links the archaic meaning of the pillar with the stupa.

5. John S. Strong discusses the Asokan legends, inscriptional evidence, and scholarly interpretations in *The Legend of King Asoka: A Study and Translation of the Asokavadāna* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), chap. 1. See also, John S. Strong, "Images of Asoka: Some Indian and Sri Lankan Legends and Their Development," in *King Asoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies*, ed. Anuradha Seneviratna (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1994), 99–125.

6. Northern Thai chronicles (*tamnan*) often portray the Buddha and King Asoka as being simultaneously present at the actual or predicted establishment of towns and sacred sites. See Donald K. Swearer, Sommai Premchit, and Phaithoon Dokbuakaew, *Sacred Mountains in Northern Thailand and Their Legends* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), chap. 3. A northern Thai chronicle, the *Tamnan Mulasasana Wat Suan Dok* (The Flower Garden Monastery Chronicle), possibly composed in Chiang Mai in the fifteenth century, situates the establishment of this monastic lineage not only within the context of a universal Buddhist history associated with the Buddha Gotama and King Asoka, but also at the very beginning of the world as described in the *Aggañña Sutta* and within the lineage of previous conic Buddhas recounted in the *Buddhavaṃsa*.

7. On the basis of Asoka's Bhabru Rock Edict, Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff) observes that Asoka recommends the following *suttas* to all Buddhists, both lay and ordained: *Vinaya-samukase* (Mv.VI.40.1); *Aliya-vaṃsa* (A.IV.28); *Anāgata-bhayani* (A.V.77–80); *Munī Sutta* (Sn.I.12); *Ambalattthikara-rahulaovāda Sutta* (M.61). See Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *That the True Dhamma Might Last a Long Time* (Valley Center, Calif.: Metta Forest Monastery, n.d.).

8. Pillar Edict No. 2, quoted in T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, 8th ed. (Calcutta: Susil Gupta, 1959), 134.

9. For analyses of the *Aggañña Sutta*, see Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, chap. 2; and Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, chap. 6 and appendix 5.

10. Bardwell L. Smith, "The Ideal Social Order as Portrayed in the Chronicles of Ceylon," in *The Two Wheels of Dhamma: Essays on the Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon*, ed. B. L. Smith, AAR Studies in Religion, no. 3 (Chambersburg, Pa: American Academy of Religion, 1972), 40. In the same volume, see Frank E. Reynolds, "The Two Wheels of Dhamma. A Study of Early Buddhism."

11. This name is transliterated as Anoratha, Aniruddha, Anuruddha, or Anawrahta. I follow Michael Aung-Thwin's transliteration (Aniruddha) used in *The Mists of Rāmañña*.

12. On Dutthagamani, see Alice Greenwald, "The Relic on the Spear: Historiography and the Saga of Dutthagamani," in *Buddhism and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, Pa: Anima Books, 1978), 13–25.

13. Xangzang's (Hsüan-tsang) diary testifies to the omnipresence of stupas and their centrality to popular piety throughout his travels in India. For Xangzang's diary, see Samuel Beal, trans., *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, 2 vols. (1884; reprint, Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1969).

14. David Snellgrove, ed., *The Image of the Buddha* (New York and Tokyo: Kodansha International / UNESCO, 1978), 404. The stupa as pilgrimage site and the cult of Buddha relics are two of the hallmarks of the relationship between kingship and Buddhism. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, it is recorded that after the Buddha's death, the eight world rulers divided the Buddha's relics. Legend claims that King Asoka subsequently increased the number of relics to 84,000.

15. A valuable and detailed study of the stupa in Buddhist Asia is Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Southeast Asian Studies Program, 1985). Snodgrass is indebted to previous work on stupa symbolism by Heinrich Zimmer, Mircea Eliade, and in particular, Paul Mus's monumental work, *Barabudur: Esquisse d'une histoire du bouddhisme fondée sur la critique archéologique des textes*, 2 vols. (1932; reprint, Hanoi and Paris: École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1978). For a collection of interpretative essays, see Anna Libera Dallapiccola, ed., *The Stūpa: Its Religious, Historical and Architectural Significance* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1980).

16. See Mus, *Barabudur*; and A. M. Hocart, "The Origin of the Stupa," *Ceylon Journal of Science* 1, no. 1 (1924): 15–26.

17. John Irwin, "The Stūpa and the Cosmic Axis: The Archaeological Evidence," in *South Asian Archaeology 1977*, ed. Maurizio Taddei (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1979), 842, quoted in W. Norman Brown, "The Creation Myth of the Rig-veda," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 62 (1942): 85–98.

18. Irwin, "The Stūpa and the Cosmic Axis," 826.

19. Benjamin Rowland, Jr., *The Art and Architecture of India* (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 51. The number 84,000 also refers to the totality of the Buddha's teaching, or cosmically, the sum total of reality. This cosmological reference underlies the mythic association of 84,000 with relics.

20. Dutt, *The Buddha and Five After-Centuries*, 174.
21. Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, 2d ed., vol. 1, Bollingen Series, 39 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 233.
22. Dutt, *The Buddha and Five After-Centuries*, 178.
23. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, 236.
24. Dutt, *The Buddha and Five After-Centuries*, 170. Dutt makes a strong but unsubstantiated identification with King Asoka.
25. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 70.
26. Michael A. Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985), 47.
27. Robert von Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, Southeast Asia Data Paper, no. 18 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1956). See also Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 109.
28. George Coedès, *Angkor: An Introduction*, trans. and ed. Emily Floyd Gardiner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), quoted in Robert von Heine-Geldern, "Weltbild und Bauform in Sudostasien," *Wiener Beiträge zur Kunst und Kultur Asiens* 4 (1930): 28–78.
29. Charles Higham, *The Archaeology of Mainland Southeast Asia from 10,000 B.C. to the Fall of Angkor*, Cambridge World Archeology Series (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 254. Scholars who have interpreted the classical polities of Southeast Asia in terms of mandalic structure, galactic polity, and the categories of center-periphery include: Oliver W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982); and Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*.
30. See Paul Mus, "Thousand-Armed Kannon: A Mystery or a Problem?" *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* (*Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū*), 12, no. 1 (January 1964).
31. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 5.
32. *Ibid.*, 109.
33. *Ibid.*, 108–11. Tambiah focuses his analysis on the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya and its transformations into the Bangkok period.
34. Hermann Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*, trans. I. W. Mabbett, Southeast Asia Program Data Paper, no. 108 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978). Kulke challenges the interpretation of the *devaraja* concept in which the king is seen as an apotheosis of a divine being. See also, Eleanor Mannikka, *Angkor Wat: Time, Space, and Kingship* (Honolulu: Uni-

versity of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 6–9, who observes: “some aspect of the divine nature of Śiva, construed as a supreme deity, was shared by the king” (7).

35. Coedès, *Angkor*, 31.

36. Lawrence P. Briggs, “The Syncretism of Religions in Southeast Asia, Especially in the Khmer Empire,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 71, no. 4 (October–December 1951): 235.

37. Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia*, 5–6.

38. See Jean Filliozat, “New Researches on the Relations Between India and Cambodia,” *Indica*, 3, no. 2 (1966): 95–106; I. W. Mabbett, “Devarāja,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 2 (September 1969): 202ff; Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*.

39. Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult*, 33.

40. The history and architecture of Angkor has been the subject of numerous studies. See, in particular, Coedès, *Angkor: An Introduction*; Bernard Groslier and Jacques Arthaud, *Angkor: Art and Civilization*, rev. ed. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); Joan L. Cohen and Bila Kalman, *Angkor: The Monuments of the God Kings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975); Michael Freeman, *Angkor: The Hidden Glories* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990); Mannikka, *Angkor Wat: Time, Space, and Kingship*; Charles Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Jon Ortner, *Angkor: The Celestial Temples of the Khmer* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2002); Michael D. Coe, *Angkor and the Khmer Civilization* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005). For additional bibliography and extensive information on Angkor, consult the website of the Greater Angkor Project, a multinational research project based at the University of Sydney ([acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/angkor/gap/](http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/angkor/gap/)). For the Bayon, see Joyce Clark, ed., *Bayon: New Perspectives* (Bangkok: River Books, 2007).

41. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1965), 204.

42. George Coedès, *The Making of South East Asia*, trans. H. M. Wright (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 57.

43. H. G. Quartich Wales, *The Making of Greater India*, (London: Bernard Quartich, 1961), 188.

44. *Ibid.*, 195. H. G. Quartich Wales argues that the cult of mountain deities influenced the construction of the religio-royal monumental structures in Southeast Asia in *The Mountain of God: A Study in Early Religion and Kingship* (London: Bernard Quartich, 1953).

45. George Coedès, "Le culte de la royauté divinisée, source d'inspiration des grands monuments du Cambodge ancien," *Serie Orientale Roma* (Roma: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente) 5, no. 1 (1941): 1–23.
46. See Peter Sharrock, "The Mystery of the Face Towers," in *Bayon: New Perspectives*, ed. Joyce Clark (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 230–81.
47. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, 210.
48. See Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, 192–94; Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, 209–12; Groslier and Arthaud, *Angkor*; and Cohen and Kalman, *Angkor*.
49. See Coedès, *Angkor: An Introduction*, chap. 5. Mountains and oceans are fundamental components of mythic world construction.
50. Quoted in Coedès, *Angkor: An Introduction*, 54–55.
51. Coedès, *Angkor: An Introduction*, 64. See also Higham, *The Archaeology of Mainland Southeast Asia*, 335.
52. Coedès, *Angkor: An Introduction*, 65, quoted in Paul Mus, "Angkor in the Time of Jayavarman VII," *Indian Arts and Letters* 11, no. 2 (1937): 65–75.
53. According to the Burmese chronicles, the Burmese adopted Theravada Buddhism from the Mon of central Burma. Theravada Buddhism also was mediated to the Siamese through the Mon state of Dvaravati. The conventional view identifying Pali Theravada Buddhism with mainland Southeast Asia ignores the diversity of Buddhist influences in the area that more recent scholarship has demonstrated. Michael Aung-Thwin challenges the "Mon paradigm," which argues that Aniruddha adopted a Theravada Mon polity through conquest. See Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Rāmañña*. In his study of the cult of Upagupta, John S. Strong convincingly demonstrates the influence of Sanskrit Hinayana Buddhism in Burma, Thailand, and Laos. See Strong, *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta*.
54. See Gordon H. Luce, *Old Burma—Early Pagan*, 3 vols. (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1969–70). For a well-illustrated study of Pagan, see Paul Strachan, *Pagan: Art and Architecture of Old Burma* (Whiting Bay, Scotland: Kiscadale Publications, 1989). For an analysis of the Pagan conception of Buddhist kingship, see Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma*.
55. See E. Michael Mendelson, "Observations on a Tour in the Region of Mount Popa, Central Burma," *France-Asie* 179 (1963): 780–807.
56. See Pe Maung Tin and G. H. Luce, trans., *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma* (1923; reprint, Rangoon: Rangoon University, 1960), 86–89, for a discussion of the building of the Shwezigon Temple.

57. Strachan, *Pagan*, 14.
58. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, 211. See also Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites in Burma* (Rangoon: Ministry of Culture, 1972), chap. 5; and Reginald Le May, *The Culture of Southeast Asia* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954), chap. 3.
59. See Strachan, *Pagan*, 65–71, for a description of the Ananda Temple.
60. Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites in Burma*, 58.
61. Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula*, 72.
62. Of particular interest for the study of Sukhothai history, art, religion, and kingship is Betty Gosling, *Sukhothai: Its History, Culture, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); A. B. Griswold, *Towards a History of Sukhodaya Art* (Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department, 1967); Jean Boisselier, *The Heritage of Thai Sculpture*, trans. James Emmons (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1975); Carol Stratton and Miriam McNair Scott, *The Art of Sukhothai* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981); James R. Chamberlain, ed., *The Ram Khamhaeng Controversy: Collected Papers* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1991); Frank E. Reynolds and Mani B. Reynolds, *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1982); and George Coedès, “The Traibhūmikathā: Buddhist Cosmology and Treatise on Ethics,” *East and West* 7 (1957). See also Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, pt. 1.
63. I follow the interpretation of Betty Gosling, *Sukhothai*, found in chap. 4. Gosling disagrees with the usual identification of the *Manansilapatra* with a stone platform or throne that currently resides in the Grand Palace, Bangkok. See Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., “Ram Khamhaeng’s Inscription: The Search for Context,” *The Ram Khamhaeng Controversy*, ed. James R. Chamberlain, 419–37. Gosling sees similarities between the stepped Kon Laeng altar or platform and Chinese altars to the gods of earth located at the southern periphery of the city.
64. B. Gosling, *Sukhothai*, 43.
65. See Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*.
66. B. Gosling, *Sukhothai*, 64.
67. Barbara Watson Andaya, “Statecraft in the Reign of Lü Tai of Sukhodaya (ca. 1347–1374),” in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, Pa: Anima Books, 1978), 9.
68. For a discussion of the Phra Buddha Singha image, see Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, chap. 16; and Carol Stratton, *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), chap. 7.

69. Andaya, "Statecraft in the Reign of Lü Tai of Sukhodaya," 9.
70. See Chamberlain, ed., *The Ram Khamhaeng Controversy*.
71. See Michael Vickery, "On *Traibhūmikathā*," *Journal of the Siam Society* 79, pt. 2 (1991). Vickery advances his position on linguistic grounds rather than political ones.
72. Peter A. Jackson, "Thai-Buddhist Identity: Debates on the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*," in *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand, 1939–1989*, ed. Craig J. Reynolds, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, no. 25 (Clayton, Victoria, Australia: Monash University, 1991), 210. Jackson's analysis of the use of the *Traibhūmikathā* by liberal reformists relies primarily on the writings of P. A. Payutto, who is regarded as the most articulate and highly respected scholar-monk in Thailand.
73. Coedès, *Angkor: An Introduction*, 50.
74. Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, 417.
75. A parallelism pertains between the Buddha's first discourse, *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (Turning the Wheel of the Law), and the title of the Buddhist "world ruler," *cakkavartin* (wheel turner). Steven Collins provides a detailed critical analysis of the two-dhamma modalities. He queries the use of the "two wheels of dhamma" as an interpretative model, noting that the explicit juxtaposition of the two wheels is, in fact, quite uncommon in the Pali texts. See Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*, chap. 6, 473ff.
76. Pe Maung Tin and G. H. Luce, trans., *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, 6–7.
77. *Ibid.*, xiii.
78. Ratanapañña Thera, *The Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror (Jinakālamālipakaraṇam)*, trans. N. A. Jayawickrama, Pali Text Society Translation Series, no. 36 (London: Luzac and Company, 1968), 107–08.
79. Swearer, *Wat Haripūñjaya*, chap. 1; Donald K. Swearer and Sommai Premchit, *The Legend of Queen Cāma: Bodhiraṇṣī's Cāmadevīvaṇṣa, a Translation and Commentary* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), especially the introduction.
80. Adapted from Frank Reynolds, "The Holy Emerald Jewel: Some Aspects of Buddhist Symbolism and Political Legitimation in Thailand and Laos," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, Pa: Anima Books, 1978), 176.
81. *Ibid.*, 183–84. The extensive "travels" of the Emerald Buddha image in northern Thailand and the several temples that bear its name suggest the possibility that the image



may have functioned not only as a palladium of particular Tai city-states, but also as a means of linking together or enforcing political alliances among those Tai city-states.

82. See Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, chap. 2.

83. See the Government of the Union of Burma Land Nationalization Act, 1948, page 29, paragraph 9, quoted in Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds to the Burmese Revolution*, 215.

84. Donald K. Swearer, *Buddhism in Transition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 38ff.

85. *The Nation* (Bangkok), October 1958, quoted in Richard Butwell, *U Nu of Burma* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1963), 62.

86. Donald E. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 318–19.

87. Tin Maung Maung Than, “Sangha and Sasana in Socialist Burma,” *Sojourn: Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 3, no. 1 (February 1989): 27.

88. See Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom From Fear* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Bruce Matthews, “Buddhism Under a Military Regime,” *Asian Survey* 33, no. 4 (1993). For a historical and political study of contemporary Burma, see Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1987); and David Joel Steinberg, *The Future of Burma: Crises and Choice in Myanmar* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1990). In this volume, Steinberg argues that political power is calculated primarily in personal terms, which explains the rise and the dominance of a strongman like General Ne Win or the SLORC leader, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt. Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the assassinated leader (Aung San) of the Burmese nationalist movement against British colonialism, therefore, is a particularly potent and poignant figure given the personalized basis of political power in Myanmar, past and present.

See Gustaaf Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy* (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999). For an analysis of the current military regime, see, M. P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

89. Tin Maung Maung Than, “Sangha and Sasana in Socialist Burma,” 41. See also by the same author, “Sangha Reforms and Renewal of Sasana in Myanmar: Historical Trends and Contemporary Practice,” in *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, ed. Trevor Ling (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 6–63.

90. Sao Htun Hmat Win, "The Unique Solidarity of the Sangha Order," *The Light of the Dhamma* (Rangoon) 1, no. 1 (August 1981): 28.
91. For a well-documented report, consult this internet site: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007\\_Burmese\\_anti-government\\_protests/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Burmese_anti-government_protests/).
92. Heinz Bechert, "S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and the Legitimation of Power Through Buddhist Ideals," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, Pa: Anima Books, 1978), 204.
93. Tessa Bartholomeusz, "First Among Equals: Buddhism and the Sri Lankan State," in *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*, ed. Ian Harris (London: Pinter, 1999), 182.
94. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, *Speeches and Writings* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Department of Broadcasting and Information, 1963), 308.
95. For a life of the Anagarika Dharmapala, see B. G. Gokhale, "Anagarika Dharmapala: Toward Modernity Through Tradition in Ceylon," in *Tradition and Change in Theravada Buddhism*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith, Contributions to Asian Studies, vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 30–39. For a discussion of Dharmapala and creation of "Buddhist modernism," see Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, chap. 2.
96. Bartholomeusz, "First Among Equals: Buddhism and the Sri Lankan State," 174.
97. For a major study of the Tamil-Sinhalese conflict up to the mid-1980s, see S. J. Tambiah, *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). For a study of the conflict through the interpretative lens of fundamentalism, see Donald K. Swearer, "Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 628–90. For a study of religious nationalisms that situates the Sri Lankan case within a broad comparative context, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). A bibliography on the subject of religion and violence appears in Christopher Candland, *The Spirit of Violence: An Interdisciplinary Bibliography of Religion and Violence*, Occasional Papers of the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, no. 6 (New York: Guggenheim Foundation, 1992).
98. For an analysis of the complex relationship between Premadasa, Buddhism, and Sinhala identity, see Abeysekera, *Colors of the Robe*, chap. 5.

99. See Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society*; Somboon Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: The Role of the Sangha in the Modernization of Thailand* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976); and Somboon Suksamran's more recent *Buddhism and Political Legitimacy* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1993); Charles F. Keyes, "Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand," *Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 3 (May 1971); Charles F. Keyes, "Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand," *International Political Science Review* 10, no. 2 (1989); Donald K. Swearer, "Center and Periphery: Buddhism and Politics in Modern Thailand," in *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*, ed. Ian Harris (London and New York: Pinter, 1999), 194–228; Donald K. Swearer, "Buddhism and Globalization from the Historical Perspective of Thailand," in *The Anthropologist and the Native: Essays for Gananath Obeyesekere*, ed. H. L. Seneviratne (forthcoming).

100. See Ishii, *Sangha, State, and Society*, chap. 4.

101. See Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict: The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989); and Keyes, "Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand."

102. For an analysis of the veneration of monuments dedicated to political figures in Thailand and Laos, see Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes, eds., *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), chap. 4–6.

103. For an interpretation of King Rama IX as a modern *dhammaraja*, see Paul Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006).

104. Ian Harris, "Buddhism in Extremis: The Case of Cambodia," in *Buddhism and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Ian Harris (London: Pinter, 1999), 71.

105. Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*, 112–13.

106. Keyes, "Communist Revolution and the Buddhist Past in Cambodia," 48.

107. Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*, 129.

108. *Ibid.*, 137.

109. *Ibid.*, 160–61. Quoting from "Monarchy or Democracy," that appeared in the *Khmer Nissit* (The Cambodian Student) in 1952. Translated into French by Thion Serge and Ben Kiernan, and published as *Khmers rouges: Matériaux pour l'histoire du communisme au Cambodge* (Paris: J. E. Hallier-Albin Michel, 1981), 357–61.

110. Henri Locard, "The Khmer Rouge Ideology," a lecture presented at a meeting of the Informal Northern Thai Group, Chiang Mai, Thailand, March 28, 2005.
111. On this point, see Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*, 170–71.
112. Keyes, "Communist Revolution and the Buddhist Past in Cambodia," 54.
113. See Harris, *Cambodian Buddhism*, chap. 8, "Cambodian Buddhism After the Khmer Rouge."
114. *Ibid.*, 230.
115. Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos: From Buddhist Kingdom to Marxist State," in *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*, ed. Ian Harris (London: Pinter, 1999), 154–55.
116. Grant Evans, *The Politics of Ritual and Remembrance: Laos Since 1975* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 50–51.
117. Stuart-Fox, "Laos: From Buddhist Kingdom to Marxist State," 159. See also Martin Stuart-Fox and Roderick S. Bucknell, "Politicization of the Buddhist Sangha in Laos," *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies* 13, no. 1 (1982): 60–80.
118. Stuart-Fox, "Laos: From Buddhist Kingdom to Marxist State," 163.
119. Evans, *The Politics of Ritual and Remembrance*, 57.
120. *Ibid.*, 67.
121. Stuart-Fox, "Laos: From Buddhist Kingdom to Marxist State," 169.

### Part III. Buddhism and Modernization

1. For a detailed historical survey of Southeast Asia from the eighteenth century through the Vietnam War, see David J. Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, rev. ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987).
2. David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History, Politics, War, and Revolution Since 1945* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 236.
3. For discussions of Buddhism in specific cultural areas, see Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich, eds., *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991). An older but still useful work is Heinrich Dumoulin and John C. Maraldo, eds., *The Cultural, Political, and Religious Significance of Buddhism in the Modern World* (New York: Collier Books, 1976).
4. I am indebted to Thanissaro Bhikkhu for suggesting the basic content of this paragraph. In general, Buddhist social ethics tends to emphasize the importance of the attitude

or intention underlying action, rather than a strict adherence to a set of rules. This emphasis on intentionality can be seen, for example, in the Buddhist attitude toward the acquisition and use of wealth. See Sizemore and Swearer, ed., *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics*.

5. The Vietnamese Zen monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, analyzes the Vietnam War from a Buddhist perspective in *Lotus in a Sea of Fire* (London: SCM Press, 1961). Nhat Hanh is a leading spokesperson for a social activist involvement for which he coined the phrase, “Engaged Buddhism.”

6. Western scholarly interest in the political involvement of the Buddhist sangha in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia peaked in the 1960s and 1970s. The role of Buddhism in the post-colonial / early nationalist period and the Buddhist protest against the Diem regime during the Vietnam War contributed to this interest. Jerrold Schechter’s *The New Face of Buddha* (Tokyo: John Weatherhill, 1967) typifies a popular, journalistic approach to this issue. For substantial collections of scholarly articles on the subject in both historical and modern contexts, see two works edited by Bardwell L. Smith, *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka; and Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*.

7. This issue is discussed in Donald K. Swearer, “Community Development and Thai Buddhism: The Dynamics of Tradition and Change,” *Visakha Puja 2516* (Bangkok: Buddhist Association of Thailand, 1973).

8. Charles F. Keyes, “Moral Authority of the Sangha and Modernity in Thailand: Sexual Scandals, Sectarian Dissent, and Political Resistance,” in *Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium: Essays in Honor of the Ven. Phra Dhammapitaka (Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto) on his 60th Birthday Anniversary*, ed. Sulak Sivaraksa (Bangkok: Sathira-Nagapradipa Foundation and Foundation for Children, 1999), 121–47.

9. *The Buddhist* 38, no. 2 (July 1967): 47.

10. For a discussion of the Phra Phimontham case, see Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation and Conflict*, chap. 5; also see chap. 3 of Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand: A Study of Socio-Political Change and Political Activism of the Thai Sangha* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982). The Phra Phimontham case also involved sectarian rivalry within the Thai sangha between the Thammayut and Mahanikai.

11. Andrew Higgins, “How Buddhism Became a Force for Political Activism,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2007.

12. For a recent interpretation from a philosophical/ethnographical perspective of the political events surrounding the coups of 1973, 1976, and 1991 in Thailand, see Alan Klima, *The Funeral Casino: Meditation, Massacre, and Exchange with the Dead in Thailand* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), chap. 3–5.

13. See Charles F. Keyes, “Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand,” in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, Pa: Anima Books, 1978); and Somboon Suksamran, *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*, chap. 5. I cite this case at some length to illustrate a type of politicization of the sangha.

14. For a discussion of the Village Scouts, see Katherine Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty: An Anthropology of the State and the Village Scout Movement in Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

15. Bhikkhu Kitthiwuttho, *Sing Thi Khuan Khamnueng* [Things we should reflect on] (Bangkok: Abhidhamma Foundation, 1971), 8.

16. *Ibid.*, 48.

17. Keyes, “Political Crisis and Militant Buddhism in Contemporary Thailand,” 153.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Bhikkhu Kitthiwuttho, *Kha Communist Mai Bap* [Killing communists is not demeritorious] (Bangkok: Abhidhamma Foundation, 1976), 49–52.

20. *Ibid.*, 48.

21. See Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict*, chap. 8; Edwin Zehner, “Reform Symbolism of a Thai Middle-Class Sect: The Growth and Appeal of the Thammakai Movement,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 21, no. 2 (September 1990); Suwanna Satha-Anand, “Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand: Buddhist Struggles for Modern Relevance,” *Asian Survey* 30, no. 4 (April 1990); James L. Taylor, “New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: An ‘Individualistic Revolution,’ Reform and Political Dissonance,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 21, no. 1 (March 1990); Swearer, “Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism.”

22. Adapted from Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 28–30. In Rory Mackenzie’s study of Wat Thammakai and Santi Asok, he develops emic (insider) and etic (outsider) analyses of the Thammakai movement. His emic description includes the following characteristics: a charismatic leader believed to have special powers; generous giving to the movement guaran-

tees both economic and spiritual success; a large, efficient, and prosperous national center; a simple form of meditation practice that fits well with a busy, consumer lifestyle; the support of some national leaders. His summary of etic types includes: a fundamentalistic millenarianism; a galactic structure; and a commodity-prosperity movement. See Rory Mackenzie, *New Buddhist Movements in Thailand: Towards an Understanding of Wat Phra Dhammakāya and Santi Asoke* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), chap. 3.

23. Suwanna Satha-Anand, "Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand," 402.

24. See Paisal Sricharatchanya and Ian Buruma, "Praise the Buddha and Pass the Baht," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 18, 1987, 53–55. For critiques of the movement, see P. A. Payutto (Phra Dhammapitaka), *Karani Thammakai* [The case of Thammakai] (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1998); and Sulak Sivaraksa, *Thammakai: Fang Sen Sutthai Haeng Khwam Sueam Salai* [Thammakai: The "last straw" in the decline of the Thai sangha] (Bangkok: Thammasan, 1999).

25. Sanitsuda Ekachai, "Keeping the Faith," *Bangkok Post*, December 21, 1998. For her analysis, she relies upon Apinya Fuengfusakul's article, "Sasanat Khong Chumchon Mueang Samai Mai: Sueksa Karani Wat Phrathammakai" [Religious propensity of urban communities: a case study of Phra Thammakai temple], *Warasan Phutthasanasueksa Chulalongkorn Mahawitayalai* [Journal of Buddhist Studies, Chulalongkorn University] 5, no. 1 (March–April 1998), 4–84.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu applies the following typology to monks actively involved in reformist movements and national development projects in Thailand: (1) monks who are influenced by Western models and who believe that they should be directly involved in the economic uplift of the poor (e.g., Phra Phutthaphotnawaraphon); (2) monks who draw upon the traditional alliance that exists between sangha and state (e.g., the Wat Thammakai movement); (3) monks who seek inspiration from the forest tradition perceived as the original, authentic tradition (e.g., Buddhadasa or Phothirak's Santi Asok movement).

26. See Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto), *Karani Thammakai*, 33; Mano Mettanando Laohavanich, "Thai Rak Thai Party and Dhammakaya Temple—perfect match," <http://www.rickcross.com/reference/general/general644.html/>.

27. F. Bruce Morgan, "Vocation of Monk and Layman: Signs of Change in Thai Buddhist Ethics," in *Tradition and Change in Theravada Buddhism*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith, Contributions to Asian Studies, no. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 71. See also, David L. Gosling, "New Directions in Thai Buddhism," *Modern Asian Studies* 14, no. 3 (1980): 411–39.

28. E. Michael Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma: A Study of Monastic Sectarianism and Leadership*, ed. John P. Ferguson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), 306ff.
29. Swearer, *Buddhism in Transition*, 46ff.
30. See George D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition Reinterpretation and Response* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), chap. 7; and George D. Bond, *Buddhism at Work: Community Development, Social Empowerment, and the Sarvodaya Movement* (Bloomfield, Conn.: Kumarian Press, Inc., 2004), chap. 1.
31. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, 241.
32. Phra Mahachai Aphakaro, "Kan Prapprung Botbat Khong Phra Song" [Reforming the role of the sangha], *Kalapa-phruet* 1, no. 1 (1972): 1. On this issue, note the contrast between the interpretations of Bruce Morgan and Phra Mahachai.
33. *Ibid.*, 4–23.
34. Keys, "Moral Authority of the Sangha and Modernity in Thailand," 121–29; Peter A. Jackson, "The Enchanting Spirit of Thai Capitalism: The Cult of Luang Phor Khoon and the Post-modernization of Thai Buddhism," *South East Asia Research* 7, no. 1 (March 1999): 6. Keys maintains that those who identify the cult of Luang Pho Khun (Khoon) with the commercialization of Thai Buddhism reflect an anxiety about what constitutes moral authority in modernized Thai Buddhism, whereas Jackson proposes that the cult should be seen as an example of Thai cultural adaptability in which Western capitalism has been indigenized within a Thai symbolic framework.
35. Somboon Suksamran, "A Buddhist Approach to Development: The Case of 'Development Monks' in Thailand," in *Reflections on Development in Southeast Asia*, ed. Teck Ghee (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), 26. See also Somboon Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: The Role of the Sangha in the Modernization of Thailand* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976). For a discussion on the distinction between monks involved in government development programs and those working independently or as an NGO, see Susan M. Darlington, "Buddhism and Development: The Ecology Monks of Thailand," in *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish, and Damien Keown (London: Routledge Curzon Press, 2003), 96–109; Pithaya Wongkun, *Luang Pho Nan: Building Peace*, trans. Joshua J. Prokopy (Bangkok: TICD and Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute, 1996), 6–7.
36. Somboon Suksamran, "A Buddhist Approach to Development," 26–27.



37. Most studies of Thai monks involved in social and economic development issues have focused on its political aspects. See, for example, Somboon Suksamran, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, chap. 4. For a descriptive account of the work of individual monks, see Seri Phongphit, *Religion in a Changing Society: Buddhism, Reform and the Role of Monks in Community Development in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Arena Press, 1988). For studies of development and forest conservation monks, consult three works of Susan M. Darlington: "The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand," *Ethnology* 37, no. 1 (winter 1998); "Ritual and Risk: Environmental Buddhism in Practice," accessed on December 10, 2005, <http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/resources/print/dongguk/darlington.pdf/>; "Buddhism and Development: The Ecology Monks of Thailand." See also, James L. Taylor, "'Thamma-chaat': Activist monks and competing discourses of nature and nation in northeastern Thailand," in *Seeing Forests for Trees: Environment and Environmentalism in Thailand*, ed. Philip Hirsch (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996).

38. Seri Phongphit, *Religion in a Changing Society*, 45.

39. *Ibid.*, 49.

40. *Ibid.*, 51.

41. *Ibid.*, 52.

42. *Ibid.*, 57. For a biography of Luang Pho Nan published in 1988, and subsequently translated into English, see Pithaya Wongkun, *Luang Pho Nan*.

43. Pithaya Wongkun, *Luang Pho Nan*, 31.

44. For a brief biography of Luang Pu Chan (AKA Phra Phutthaphotnawaraphon, Phra Dhammadilok, and Thepkavi Kusalo) and a description of the work of the Foundation for Education and Development of Rural Areas (FEDRA) in both Thai and English, see *Thi Raluek 71 Pi Phra Thepkavi* [In honor of Phra Thepkavi's 71st birthday] (Chiang Mai: Foundation for Rural Development, 2532 B.E. / 1989 C.E.). See also Susan M. Darlington, *Buddhism, Morality, and Change: The Local Response to Development in Thailand* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1990).

45. The Foundation for Children in Bangkok claims that there were 2.5 million prostitutes in Thailand in 1994 with an increasing number of them children, both male and female. Other NGOs set the figure at one million children with government estimates even lower. Prostitution has greatly abetted the spread of AIDS in Thailand, a problem largely ignored in the country until 1990.

46. This is adapted from *Wisdom of Ven. Phra Thepkavi*, trans. S. Chandra Ngarm (Chiang Mai, 1988).
47. Darlington, "Buddhism and Development: The Ecology Monks of Thailand," 104. Darlington is of the opinion that the first tree ordination was done by Phrakhru Manas of Phayao Province as a strategy for forest conservation.
48. *Ibid.*, 105.
49. Darlington, "The Ordination of a Tree," 6.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Suchira Payulpitack, "Buddhadāsa's Movement: An Analysis of Its Origins, Development, and Social Impact," (Ph.D. diss., University of Bielefeld, 1991), chap. 7. Suchira analyzes Achan Phongsak as an example of an activist monk-follower of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.
52. *Ibid.*, 226, with minor adaptations.
53. "The Sangha Metta Project," <http://www.Buddhanet.net/sangha-metta/project.html/>.
54. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, chap. 2.
55. See Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
56. Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, 93ff. See also John P. Ferguson, "The Quest for Legitimation by Burmese Monks and Kings: The Case of the Shwegyin Sect (19th–20th Centuries)," in *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, Pa: Anima Books, 1978). Tambiah's subsequent study of forest monks in Thailand (*The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*) more fully develops Ferguson's theme of the relationship between king/politician and monk. For a study of the relationship between the Thai forest monk tradition and political elites, see J. L. Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State*: "Despite their close proximity to the establishment, it is rarely *pariyat* monks (clerical educators, scholars, and administrators) but forest dwellers who are fervently sought after to secure and buttress secular power bases." (285).
57. Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, 88. For the rules of the Shwegyin sect, see Than Tun, *Essays on the History and Buddhism of Burma* (Whiting Bay, Scotland: Kiscadale Publications, 1988), 167–73.
58. See the work of the Sinhalese Buddhist philosopher, K. N. Jayatilleke, *Ethics in Buddhist Perspective*, Wheel Publication, no. 175–176 (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1972); *Facets of Buddhist Thought*, Wheel Publication, no. 162–164 (Kandy: The Buddhist

Publication Society, 1971); *Survival and Karma in Buddhist Perspective*, Wheel Publication, no. 141–143 (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1969). For a Theravada critique of Christian fideism, see Gunapala Dharmasiri, *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Conception of God*, 2d ed. (Sierra Madre, Calif.: Golden Leaves Publishing Company, 1988).

59. For example, see Ledi Sayadaw, *The Manuals of Buddhism* (Rangoon: Union Buddha Sasana Council, 1965); and Ledi Sayadaw, *A Manual of the Excellent Man (Uttamapurisa Dīpanī)*, ed. Bhikkhu Pesala (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 2000).

60. For an analysis of the biography of U Ba Khin, see Houtman, “The Biography of Modern Burmese Buddhist Meditation Master U Ba Khin.” See also Sayagyi U Ba Khin, *The Real Values of True Buddhist Meditation* (Rangoon: Vipassana Association, 1961); S. N. Goenka, *Meditation Now: Inner Peace Through Inner Wisdom* (Igatpuri, India: Vipassana Research Publication, 2002).

61. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 208–12.

62. Keyes, “Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand,” 124.

63. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 208–18. Thanissaro Bhikkhu suggests that a more accurate characterization would be a strict scripturalism with regard to the *vinaya*, a more critical rationalism with regard to the dhamma, and a critical-historical approach to the commentaries. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, letter to author, November 14, 1994.

64. Sanguan Chotisukharat, *Khon Di Mueang Nuea* [The good people of northern Thailand] (Bangkok: Odian Store, 1972), 328.

65. Keyes, “Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand,” 551–67.

66. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, 136.

67. Phra Rajavaramuni (P. A. Payutto) *Photchananukrom Phutthasat Chabap Pramuan Tham* [Dictionary of Buddhism: Dhamma] (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn University, 2538 B.E. / 1995 C.E.); Phra Devedhi (P. A. Payutto) *Photchananukrom Phutthasat Chabap Pramuan Sap* [Dictionary of Buddhism: vocabulary] (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn University, 2531 B.E. / 1988 C.E.); Phra Prayudh Payutto (P. A. Payutto), *Buddhadhamma: Natural Laws and Values for Life*, trans. Grant A. Olson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). English translations of Payutto’s work published by the Buddhadhamma Foundation, Bangkok, include: *Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Market Place*, 2d ed., trans. Dhammavijaya and Bruce G. Evans (1994); *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*, trans. Bruce G. Evans (1994); *Good, Evil, and Beyond: Kamma in the Buddha’s Teaching*, 2d ed., trans. Bruce G. Evans (1995). See also *Toward Sustainable Science: A Buddhist Look at*

*Trends in Scientific Development*, trans. Bruce G. Evans (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1993).

68. Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto), *A Buddhist Solution for the Twenty-first Century* (Chiang Mai: The Buddhist Association, 1993), 7.

69. Ibid.

70. For a detailed discussion of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century revival of the forest tradition, see Carrithers, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*.

71. Ingrid Jordt, *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), chap. 4.

72. Bond argues this point in *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, chap. 4–6.

73. Maha Boowa Ñanasampanno, *Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera*; Maha Boowa Ñanasampanno, *Patipadā or The Mode of Practice of Venerable Acharn Mun*, trans. Paññavadho Bhikkhu (Udon Thani, Thailand: Wat Pa Baan Taad, 1997); Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, chap. 6. “Man” is also transliterated “Mun,” which follows the Thai pronunciation rather than the orthography.

74. For hagiographic accounts of monks in the Achan Man lineage, see two works by Kamala Tiyavanich, *Forest Recollections* and *The Buddha In the Jungle*. For teachings of monks in the Achan Man lineage translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, see <http://www.accesstoinsight.com/>.

75. Lee Dhammadharo, *The Autobiography of Phra Ajaan Lee*, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Bangkok: Thep Prathan, 1991).

76. For a descriptive account of Buddhadasa's life and career, see Kamala Tiyavanich, *Sons of the Buddha: The Early Lives of Three Extraordinary Thai Masters* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2007), pt. 1; Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadāsa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003). For a collection of Buddhadasa's essays, see Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa*, ed. Donald K. Swearer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989; Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991). Single titles of Buddhadasa's published essays in translation include *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree: The Buddha's Teachings on Voidness*, trans. Santikaro Bhikkhu (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 1994); *Mindfulness with Breathing*, trans. Santikaro Bhikkhu (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 1997); *Handbook for Mankind*, trans. Roderick S. Bucknell (Chaiya, Thailand: Dhammadana Foundation, 2005); *Paticca-samuppāda: Practical Dependent Origination*, trans. Steven Schmidt (Bangkok: Dhamma

Study Group, 1992). See Jack Kornfeld, *Living Buddhist Masters* (Santa Cruz, Calif: Unity Press, 1977) for selections from the writings of several modern Theravada meditation teachers, including Buddhadasa.

77. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Ten Years in Suan Moke*, trans. Mongkol Dejnakintra (Bangkok: Pacharayasarn Editorial Board, 1984), 15–16. Quoted in Suwanna Satha-Anand, “Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand: Buddhist Struggles for Modern Relevance,” 397.

78. Buddhadasa has been the subject of several doctoral dissertations in the U.S., France, Germany, and Australia. For the two most extensive studies, see Louis Gabaude, *Une Herméneutique Bouddhique Contemporaine de Thaïlande: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu* (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1988); and Tomoi Ito, “Discussions in the Buddhist Public Sphere in Twentieth-century Thailand: Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu and His World” (Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, Canberra, 2001). Also, Suchira Payulpitack, “Buddhadāśa’s Movement: An Analysis of Its Origins, Development and Social Impact.”

79. Buddhadasa’s interpretation of Buddhism was influenced by both Asian and Western modernist Buddhist interpreters as well as Western thought, his reading of Christian scriptures and, in particular, Zen Buddhism. Some critics of Buddhadasa accuse him of being a crypto-Mahayanist because of his emphasis on emptiness and his statement that “nibbana is in *samsara*.” Buddhadasa’s major themes, especially his critical stance with regard to any kind of essentialism, are consistent with other contemporary interpreters of Theravada Buddhism. For example, see David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1992).

80. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Buddhasanik Kap Kan Anurak Thammachat* [Buddhists and the conservation of nature] (Bangkok: Komol Khemthong Foundation, 1990).

81. Buddhadasa, conversation with the author at Suan Mokkh, November 10, 1976.

82. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Kan Tham-ngan Duai Chit Wang* [Working with a liberated mind] (Bangkok: Society for the Propagation of Buddhism, 1975), 13.

83. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

84. Buddhadasa’s philosophy of interdependence is a basic theme in contemporary reformist Buddhism, especially socially engaged Buddhism. See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1987). See also, Donald K. Swearer, “Buddhism and the Challenges of the Modern World,” *Seeds of Peace* 23, no. 1 (January–April, 2550 B.E. / 2007 C.E.).

85. Santisuk Sobhanasiri, ed., *Phutthathat Yang Yu Pai Mai Tai* [Buddhadasa has not passed away but continues to live], 2 vols. (Bangkok: Committee Managing the 100th Celebration of Buddhadasa, 2549 B.E. / 2006 C.E.). Volume 1 is entitled, “Chiwit lae Kan Thamngan” [Life and work]; volume 2 contains essays on Buddhadasa; and volume 3 contains three essays written by him. The one hundredth natal centenary publications include Wirot Siriat, ed., *Phutthathat Bhikkhu: Prawatchiwit, Kan-ngan, Laktham* [Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: life, work, and teachings] (Bangkok: Dhamma Association and Center for Buddhist Books, 2549 B.E. / 2006 C.E.).

86. Suchira Payulpitack, “Buddhadāsa’s Movement,” 178.

87. Jackson, *Buddhism, Legitimation, and Conflict*, 120.

88. Phra Phayom focused his attack on Phra Yantra. During the first few months of 1994, both Thai and English language newspapers carried almost daily coverage of the Yantra scandal. The most serious charge brought against the monk was that he committed the *parajika* offense of sexual intercourse. The Department of Religious Affairs and the Supreme Sangha Council reviewed the case and found insufficient evidence to substantiate the charges. A group of forty-three professors from Chiang Mai University requested that the SSC reconsider its ruling. Phra Phayom used the occasion to call into question the adulation afforded popular, charismatic monks, which, he contends, is more appropriate for movie stars than renunciants. P. A. Payutto makes a similar point, seeing in the Phra Yantra case a symptom of a chronic problem in Thai society, wherein consumerism has become the new “religion,” and monks are treated as just one more commodity. In an earlier period, P. A. Payutto contends, the laity gave to the monastic order to get rid of selfishness and elevate one’s state of mind. Now, however, people do not “give” but “buy” what they believe will help them grow richer. See Sanitsuda Ekachai, “Why Wisdom Is Better Than Magic,” *Bangkok Post*, March 17, 1994. In response to mounting criticism, the SSC expelled Phra Yantra from the Thai sangha.

Gender, sexuality, and sexual behavior have become major religious issues today, especially with regard to religious celibacy. The Phra Yantra case is not unlike the widely publicized incidents of sexual misconduct in both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in America. Sexuality has become an occasion for heated debate and discussion in Thailand. One monk phrased the dilemma of celibacy in modern Thai consumerist society in this way: “There seems to be no more room for monks in this society . . . If we look [straight] ahead we are criticized as not being *riap-roi* [polite]. If we lower our eyes, we cannot see the cluttered way [in front

of us]. If we look up, there it is—the advertisement for women’s underpants.” Quoted in Santisuda Ekachai, “Buddhism at Odds with Sexuality” *Bangkok Post*, March 4, 1994.

89. Sulak Sivaraksa and Dhammananda Bhikkhuni (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh) are discussed in the following section. Dr. Praves Wasi, former rector of Mahidol University and recipient of the Magsaysay Award for his outstanding contribution to medical research, is advisor to several Buddhistically-grounded NGOs. He has written extensively on issues of Buddhism and the problems facing contemporary Thai society.

90. For the purposes of this study, I interpret Santi Asok as a movement that adapts ideals exemplified by the Thai forest tradition, rather than my previous characterization as a fundamentalistic or neotraditional-type movement. See my essays, “Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravāda Buddhism,” and “Sulak Sivaraksa’s Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society.”

91. Phra Phothirak, *Satcha Haeng Chiwit* [My life story] (Bangkok: Dhammasanti Foundation, 1982), 84. In addition to Phothirak, several popular contemporary Buddhist teachers from secular backgrounds became monks, for example, the founders of the Thammakai movement. For studies of the Thammakai and Santi Asok movements, see Apinya Fuengfusakul, “Empire of Crystal and Utopian Commune: Two types of contemporary Theravāda reform in Thailand,” *Sojourn* 8, no. 1 (February 1993); James L. Taylor, “Buddhist Revitalization, Modernization, and Social Change in Contemporary Thailand,” *Sojourn* 8, no. 1 (February 1993); Mackenzie, *New Buddhist Movements*.

92. Current statistics for Santi Asok are difficult to determine. I have drawn from Kanoksak Kaewthep, “An ‘Imagining’ Community: The Case of Sisa Asoke, Si Sa Ket Province,” in *Imagining Communities in Thailand: Ethnographic Approaches*, ed. Shigeharu Tanabe (Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2008), 62; and Juliana M. Essen, “Santi Asoke Buddhist Reform Movement: Building Individuals, Community, and (Thai) Society,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 11 (2004): 7. See also, Juliana M. Essen, “*Right Development*”: *The Santi Asoke Buddhist Reform Movement of Thailand* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2005); and Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn, *Buddhism With Open Eyes: Belief and Practice of Santi Asoke* (Bangkok: Fah Apai Company, Ltd., 1997).

93. Kanoksak Kaewthep, “An ‘Imagining’ Community,” 59–67.

94. See Duncan J. McCargo, *Chamlong Srimuang and the New Thai Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997) for a discussion of Chamlong’s career and his connection to the Santi Asok movement.

95. Keyes, “Moral Authority of the Sangha and Modernity in Thailand,” 123.

96. Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto), *Karani Santi Asok* [The case of Santi Asok] (Bangkok: Buddhhadhamma Foundation, 1998).

97. Sanitsuda Ekachai, "Phothirak may have the last laugh," *Bangkok Post*, March 26, 1997, quoted in Keyes, "Moral Authority of the Sangha and Modernity in Thailand," 129.

98. Essen, "Santi Asoke Buddhist Reform Movement," 8–9.

99. Ibid., 14. Kanoksak Kaewthep, "An 'Imagining' Community," analyzes *bun niyom* under the heading, "From an economics of giving to an economics of nirvana," 75.

100. See Charles Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

101. See Phra Debvedi (P. A. Payutto) *Helping Yourself to Help Others*, trans. Puriso Bhikkhu (Bangkok: Buddhhadhamma Foundation, 1990) for an approach to the self/other ethical polarity that is at the core of a Buddhist justification for social service.

102. See Winston L. King, "Contemporary Burmese Buddhism," in *The Cultural, Political, and Religious Significance of Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. Heinrich Dumoulin and John C. Maraldo (New York: Collier Books, 1976), 81–98; and Winston L. King, *A Thousand Lives Away: Buddhism in Contemporary Burma* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964).

103. For example, see Mahasi Sayadaw, *The Progress of Insight*; and Mahasi Sayadaw, *Practical Insight Meditation* (Kandy: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1971). Also see Jordt, *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement*, chap. 1–2.

104. King, *A Thousand Lives Away*, 227.

105. Ibid., 226–27.

106. Ibid., 227.

107. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival*, 212ff. Bond places a major emphasis on meditation movements in the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

108. *Thammathan Khong Khun Mae Dr. Siri Krinchai* [Mother Dr. Siri Krinchai's gift of Dhamma], 5th printing (Bangkok: Horatanachaikan Press, 2536 B.E. / 1993 C.E.), 48–52. Published in honor of Dr. Siri Krinchai's seventy-second birthday, this volume includes a biography, an essay on her philosophy of meditation, and testimonials by her followers. Her workshops are very demanding. Participants spend most of the day in meditation. I am grateful to Sukhon Polpatipicharn, one of her followers, for calling my attention to this volume.



109. *Prawat Wat Rampoeng* [History of Wat Rampoeng] (Chiang Mai: Chang Pueak Press, n.d.), 9.

110. This practice focuses on the rising and falling of the abdomen. In Thailand it is usually referred to simply as the “rising and falling” (*phong-no/yup-no*) insight (*vipassana*) method. Although several different types of meditation practice are current in Thailand, practitioners often ask if you practice the *vipassana* method of *phong-no/yup-no*, that is, the Mahasi Sayadaw method, or the concentration (*samatha*) method of Phuttho . . . Phuttho (focusing on the name of the Buddha) associated with Achan Man.

111. This method can be found in a booklet available at the monastery entitled, *Khumue Kanpatibat Vipassanakammattban* [Handbook for meditation practice] (Chiang Mai: Wat Rampoeng, 1993).

112. The Thai term *chi* is derived from the Pali *pabbajita* (one who has gone forth, a renunciant).

113. Tipawadee Amawattana et al., “The Use of Vipassana Meditation as a Strategy for Developing [a] Qualitative Counseling Service” (paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Thai Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, July 8, 1993). Several *wats* throughout the country also promote meditation-based AIDS and addictive drug treatment centers, an example being Wat Doi Keong in Mae Hong Son Province.

114. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

115. This observation corresponds to Robert Bellah’s characterization of the individualistic character of the “modern” stage of religious development. See Robert N. Bellah, “Religious Evolution,” in *Beyond Belief*, ed. Robert N. Bellah (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). See also J. L. Taylor, “New Buddhist Movements in Thailand,” who makes a similar point but from a different analytical perspective.

116. *The Buddhist* 37, no. 1 (June 1966): 7.

117. Discussed in Donald K. Swearer, “Lay Buddhism and the Buddhist Revival in Ceylon,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 38, no. 3 (September 1970): 266ff.

118. Nyanaponika’s best-known book in the West is *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (London: Rider, 1962). His articles and translations cover a wide range of subjects, in particular, the *Abhidhamma*. Nyanaponika was a student of the German monk, Nyanatiloka who founded the Island Hermitage monastery near Colombo on land donated by the Sinese business magnate and philanthropist, Sir Ernest de Silva. Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translations of Pali *suttas* are published by Wisdom Publications in Somerville, Massachusetts.

119. Information about the Sarvodaya movement and its founder, A. T. Ariyaratne, can be found on the website: [www.sarvodaya.org](http://www.sarvodaya.org). For studies about Ariyaratne and the Sarvodaya movement, see Joanna Rogers Macy, *Dharma and Development: Religion as Resource in the Sarvodaya Self-Help Movement* (West Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 1983); Bond, *Buddhism at Work: Community Development, Social Empowerment and the Sarvodaya Movement*; Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, chap. 7; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, chap. 7; Denis Goulet, *Survival with Integrity* (Colombo: Marga Institute, 1981); and Detlef Kantowsky, *Sarvodaya: The Other Development* (Delhi: Vikas, 1980). Gombrich and Obeyesekere offer the most critical interpretation of the movement as an expression of what they call “protestant Buddhism.” They regard much of what has been written about Sarvodaya as well intentioned but naive reflections of their authors’ “own utopian fantasies of a benevolent social order” (243). Bond’s more descriptive view contrasts Sarvodayan “engaged Buddhism” with the chauvinistic, militant civic religion Buddhism that S. J. Tambiah critiques in *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

120. Joanna Rogers Macy, “Dependent Co-arising: The Distinctiveness of Buddhist Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (spring 1979): 49.

121. A. T. Ariyaratne, (lecture given at the University of Hawaii, September 17, 1993).

122. Macy, “Dependent Co-arising,” 50.

123. Bond, *Buddhism At Work*, 78–87.

124. *Ibid.*, chap. 2. See also, Abeysekera, *Colors of the Robe*, 213–39.

125. Sulak Sivaraksa has written extensively in both Thai and English. Information about him and his writings can be found on his website: [www.sulak-sivaraksa.org](http://www.sulak-sivaraksa.org). His autobiography, *Chuang Haeng Chiiwit* [Phases of my life] (Bangkok: Thianwan Press, 1984), lists eighty-four Thai book titles, and the list continues to grow. An abbreviated autobiography has been published in English, *Loyalty Demands Dissent: Autobiography of an Engaged Buddhist* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998). Among his most recent English language publications is *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2005). A collection of essays published for Sulak’s seventieth birthday is *Socially Engaged Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sulak Sivaraksa on his 70th Birthday*, ed. David W. Chappell (Bangkok: Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute, 2003). The following discussion about Sulak borrows from my article, “Sulak Sivaraksa’s Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society,” *Crossroads* 7, no. 1 (January 1991). This article also appeared as the afterword in

the Thai edition of Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society* (Berkeley: Parallax Press / International Network of Engaged Buddhists, 1992). An expanded and revised version of my essay is included in Sallie B. King and Christopher S. Queen, eds., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

126. Sulak Sivaraksa, *Siamese Resurgence* (Bangkok: Asian Forum on Development, 1985), 316.

127. The Committee on Religion and Development, a group that Sulak was instrumental in founding, publishes the journal, *Sekhiyadhamma*. Its stated purpose is the exchange of ideas and experiences regarding ways to make Buddhism both personally and socially relevant to the problems of contemporary Thailand.

128. Swearer, "Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society," 46–47.

129. See Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace* 23, no. 1 (January–April 2007): 3.

130. Sanitsuda Ekachai, "Buddhism at Odds with Sexuality." In the *Anguttara Nikāya*. II.82.3. [Ananda asks the Buddha], "Pray, lord, what is the reason, what is the cause why women neither sit in a court of justice, nor embark on business, nor reach the heart of any matter?" To which Gotama replies, "Women are uncontrolled, Ananda. Women are envious, Ananda. Women are greedy, Ananda. Women are weak in wisdom, Ananda. This is the reason why women do not sit in a court of justice, do not embark on business, do not reach the heart of the matter."

131. Sponberg, "Attitudes Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism," 8.

132. Academic studies of women and Buddhism have prompted a wide range of scholarship on feminist and gender related issues. See the essays on this subject in Cabezón, *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*.

133. Thomas Kirsch, "Buddhism, Sex Roles and the Thai Economy," in *Women of Southeast Asia*, ed. Penny Van Esterik, Center for Southeast Asia Studies, Occasional Paper, no. 9 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1982), 16–41.

134. See Khin Thitsa (Khin-Thi-Da Lwin), *Providence and Prostitution: Image and Reality for Women in Buddhist Thailand* (London: Change International Reports, 1980). See also, Marjorie Muecke, "Mother Sold Food, Daughter Sells Her Body: The Cultural Continuity of Prostitution," *Social Science and Medicine* 35, no. 7 (1992): 891–901.

135. See Keyes, "Mother, Mistress, but Never a Monk."

136. Penny Van Esterik, *Materializing Thailand* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 66, chap. 3–6, and 164–65 for a summary of discourses on Thai prostitution.

137. David L. Gosling, “The Changing Roles of Thailand’s Lay Nuns (Mae Chii),” *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 26, no. 1 (1998): 128.

138. Ibid.

139. See Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, “Buddhist Nuns in Other Countries,” in *Thai Women in Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), 89–91; Jordt, “Bhikkhuni, Thilashin Mae-chii: Women Who Renounce the World in Buddhist Texts.” For women renunciants in Sri Lanka, see Tessa Bartholomeusz, “The Female Mendicant in Buddhist Sri Lanka, in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989): 37–61; also her *Women Under the Bo Tree* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gombrich and Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, chap. 8.

140. The story of Voramai Kabilsingh can be found in Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, “Two Bhikkhuni Movements in Thailand,” in *Thai Women in Buddhism*, (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), 45–54.

141. Subatra Bhumiprabhas and Aree Chaisatien, “Spiritual Subordination,” *The Nation* (Bangkok), August 20, 2006. See Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (Dhammananda Bhikkhuni), *Bhikkhuni Buat Mai Dai* [Nuns cannot be ordained] (Bangkok: Sukhaphap Cai, 2002).

142. Among American Buddhist women, Rita M. Gross plays a major role in the international Buddhist women’s movement. For her interpretation of Buddhism and women, see *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

143. See Guy Richard Welbon, *Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); also Hallisey, “Roads Taken and Not Taken.”

144. Padmasiri de Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992); Padmasiri de Silva, *Twin Peaks: Compassion and Insight*; David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1976); Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*. In addition to his two surveys of Buddhist philosophy, Kalupahana has written interpretations of the *Dhammapada: A Path of Righteousness* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987); *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); and *Nāgārjuna* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

145. One example is Nolan P. Jacobson, *Buddhism: The Religion of Analysis* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966).

146. David Kalupahana and Indrani Kalupahana, *The Way of Siddhartha: A Life of the Buddha* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982).

147. See John Makransky, *Awakening Through Love: Unveiling Your Deepest Goodness* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2007) for meditations inspired by the wisdom of *dzogchen*.

148. Ajahn Sumedho, *The Sound of Silence: The Selected Teachings of Ajahn Sumedho* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2000). See Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Mind Like Fire Unbound* (Barre, Mass.: Dharma Dana Publications, 1993), and his essays in *Purity of Heart: Essays on the Buddhist Path* (Valley Center, Calif.: Metta Forest Monastery, 2006); and *Noble Strategy: Essays on the Buddhist Path* (Valley Center, Calif.: Metta Forest Monastery, 1999).

149. For two books specifically on Buddhism in the U.S., see Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen, eds. *American Buddhism: Methods and Finds in Recent Scholarship*, (London: Curzon, 1999); and Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Many different terms have been used to classify types of Buddhists in the U.S.—elite, evangelical, ethnic, nightstand, baggage, and sympathizers. See, for example, Thomas Tweed, “Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion,” in *American Buddhism: Methods and Finds in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Christopher S. Queen, 71–90; Jan Nattier, “Buddhism Comes to Main Street,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 21 (spring 1997): 72–80.

150. See Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Wings to Awakening* (Barre, Mass.: Dharma Education Association, 1996); Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Buddhist Monastic Code*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Valley Center, Calif.: Metta Forest Monastery, 2007); Richard H. Robinson, Willard L. Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2005).

151. For a descriptive account of Lao Buddhism in North America, see Penny Van Esterik, *Taking Refuge: Lao Buddhists in North America* (North York, Ont.: York Lanes Press, 1993). Two major studies of Theravada immigrant centers are: Paul David Numrich, *Old Wisdom in the New World* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996); and Wendy Cadge, *Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

152. Handley, *The King Never Smiles*.

## Appendix 1 *Sigāḷaka Sutta*

1. Adapted from Vajirañānavarorasa, *Navakovada* [Instructions to the newly ordained] (Bangkok: Mahamakuta, 1971), 86–94.

## Appendix 2 Borobudur

1. Contributions to the study of Borobudur include John N. Miksic, *Borobudur: Golden Tales of the Buddhas* (Boston: Shambala Press, 1990); R. Soekmono, Jacques Dumarcay, and J. G. De Casparis, *Borobudur: Prayer in Stone* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990); and Luis O. Gomez and Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., eds., *Barabudur: History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1981). See also Wales, *The Making of Greater India*; George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, ed. W. F. Vella (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1968); Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, 2d ed., vol. 1, Bollingen Series, no. 39 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960); Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*.
2. J. G. De Casparis, "Introduction," in Soekmono, Dumarcay, and De Casparis, *Borobudur: Prayer in Stone*, 14.
3. Miksic, *Borobudur*, 47.
4. See Miksic, *Borobudur*, 49, for a discussion of the distinction between the terms, stupa and *cetiya*.
5. The symbolism of the stupa has been analyzed and described using a variety of forms and idioms, including levels of spiritual development in yogic and meditative states of consciousness. These particular idioms are explored in several monographs, including: Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Freedom and Immortality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958); Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa* (Emeryville, Calif.: Dharma Publications, 1976); Roderick S. Bucknell and Martin Stuart-Fox, *The Twilight of Language: Explorations in Buddhist Meditation and Symbolism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).
6. Le May, *The Culture of Southeast Asia*, 98.
7. Mus, *Barabudur: Esquisse d'une histoire du bouddhisme fondee la critique archeologique des texts*.
8. Wales, *The Making of Greater India*, 123, referring to J. G. De Casparis, *Prasati Indonesia*, vol. 1, 195.

9. Soekmono, Dumarcay, and De Casparis, *Borobudur: Prayer in Stone*, 32.
10. The collection of essays on Borobudur in Gomez and Woodward, eds., *Barabudur* provides an overview of various interpretations of the monument.

## GLOSSARY

### A

**Abhidhamma** Literally, the “higher (*abhi*) teaching (dhamma).” Refers to the third division (*pitaka*) of the Pali language scriptures of Theravada Buddhism. Contains a diverse body of texts, but many of them represent more technical or scholastic interpretations of the dialogue (*sutta*) texts.

**Abhiseka** Literally, “to pour water.” To consecrate as in royal consecration (*raja-abhiseka*) or the consecration of Buddha images (*buddha-abhiseka*).

**Ādi Buddha** Literally, “the beginning or original Buddha.” In Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, often identified as the central Buddha of the five *dhyani* Buddhas, usually the Buddha Vairocana.

**Aggañña Sutta** One of the *suttas* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (Long Discourses), which deals with the origin of the world and the reason for the selection of a righteous ruler.

**Ānanda** In the Pali *sutta* texts of Theravada Buddhism, Ananda appears as one of the most important disciples of the Buddha. From a literary point of view, Ananda acts as a foil to the Buddha in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.

**Anāthapiṇḍika** A banker of Savatthi. He is a paradigm of the lay supporter of the Buddha and the sangha. Visakha is his female counterpart.

**Aniruddha** (1040–1077 C.E.) Considered to be the founder of the unified Burmese kingdom with the capital at Pagan.

**Angulimāla** A robber who became a follower of the Buddha and later attained arahantship. A story in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (Middle Length Discourses) 11.103–104 that tells how he eased a woman’s birth pains by an act of truth (*saccakiriya*). This came to be regarded as a *paritta* to ward off danger.

**Anattā** Literally, “not (*an-*) self (*atta*).” One of the seminal concepts in the teachings of the Buddha. Often misinterpreted as a “world-denying” concept. Refers to the non-substantiality of the self.

**Anicca** Impermanence, not-enduring. One of the three characteristics of existence together with suffering and not-self.

**Arahant** Literally, one who is worthy, deserving. A Pali term applied to one who attains nibbana.



**Āsālhā Pūjā** A celebration recalling the Buddha's first discourse, the *Dhammacakkappa-vattana Sutta* (Turning the Wheel of the Law) delivered at the Deer Park in Varanasi (Benares). It occurs on the full-moon sabbath of the eighth lunar month (*asālhā*).

**Āsava** An outflowing, a canker. The four *asavas* that are to be overcome in order to gain freedom are sensuality (*kamma*), desire for rebirth (*bhava*), attachment to views (*ditthi*), and ignorance (*avijja*).

## B

**Bhikkhu/ bhikkhunī** Literally, “almsperson.” Terms used to designate monastic followers of the Buddha; the terms refer to the fact that Theravada monks and nuns depend upon the generosity of the laity for their material well-being. The Theravada monastic order is referred to as the *bhikkhu-sangha* / *bhikkhuni-sangha*, the order of male and female almspersons.

**Bimbisāra** King of Magadha and patron of the Buddha.

**Bodhisattva** (Pali, *bodhisatta*) Literally, a “wisdom (*bodhi*) being (*sattva*).” In the Theravada tradition the word usually refers to the Buddha in his various earthly rebirths. In the Mahayana tradition the term extends to all beings seeking enlightenment or those who will be future Buddhas.

**Brahmaloka** Literally, the “world (*loka*) of Brahma.” One of the abodes of the gods in Theravada cosmology.

## C

**Cakkavatti(n)** Literally, a “wheel turner.” The term refers to Buddhist monarchs whose power in the secular realm parallels the power of the Buddha in the sacred realm.

**Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta** A *sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (Long Discourses), which is an important source of information about the traditional understanding of the *cakkavatti(n)* concept.

**Cariyāpīṭaka** One of the fifteen books of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (Collection of Gradual Sayings). Sets forth the Buddha's ten moral perfections (*parami*) by which he attained enlightenment.

**Cetiya** See **chedi**.

**Chao** A Thai term with several different possible meanings: spirit, deity, lord.

**Chedi** (Pali, *cetiya*) A tumulus, a reliquary monument embodying both cosmological and Buddhological symbolism.

## D

- Dāna** The virtue of generosity, one of the principal Theravada moral perfections (*parami*).
- Devadatta** Son of the Buddha's maternal uncle. He became one of the Buddha's almsper-sons, but later he attempts to kill the Buddha and split the order.
- Devarāja** Literally, "god-king." Thought to have been a notion of divine kingship that developed in the Khmer kingdom in the ninth century, which had an important influence on the monarchical traditions of the classical states of Southeast Asia.
- Dhamma** (Sanskrit, *dharmā*) A central concept of Theravada thought. It can refer to the basic constituents of reality, the truth, or the teachings of the Buddha. Identified with *paticca-samuppada* (interdependent co-arising).
- Dhammayut(ika) Nikāya** See **Thammayut**.
- Dhātu-gabbha** The Pali form of the Sinhalese term, *dagoba*, referring to a reliquary mound; i.e., a *cetiya*.
- Dīpavaṃsa** The *Island Chronicle*, one of the three major chronicles of Sinhalese Buddhism.
- Divyāvadāna** A Mahayana Buddhist text that contains a legendary account of the life of the Buddha.
- Dukkha** Suffering, anxiety. The unsatisfactory nature of existence limited by the sensory or the mundane world.
- Duṭṭhagāmaṇi** Ruler of Sri Lanka (161–137 B.C.E.) noted for defeating the Tamils and reuniting the country under Sinhalese rule.

## G

- Gaṇḍhavyūha** A Mahayana text concerned with the enlightenment quest of Sudhana. Sometimes referred to as a Mahayana "pilgrim's progress."

## H

- Haripuñjaya** Modern day Lamphun. The pre-Thai Mon-Lawa center of culture and political power in northern Thailand. In the thirteenth century, it was conquered by the Tai led by King Mangrai who subsequently established Chiang Mai as the dominant petty kingdom in northern Thailand.

## I

**Indra** A Hindu deity of great importance in Vedic Hinduism. In Buddhism, Indra is known as Sakka, the ruler of the gods.

## J

**Jātaka** The tenth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (Collection of Gradual Sayings) containing 547 legendary stories framed as the former lives of the Buddha.

**Jātakamālā** Literally, a “Garland of Birth Stories.” A Sanskrit rendering of thirty-four *jātakas* ascribed to Arya Sura, who may have lived in the first century C.E.

**Jhāna** States of consciousness attained through meditation. Divided into several stages, such as the four material and immaterial absorptions (D. 111. 222).

## K

**Kamma** (Sanskrit, *karma*) A central concept in Theravada Buddhist doctrine. In general parlance, kamma means act or action, however, technically it refers to the Law of Kamma, meaning that good / bad acts will bring good / bad consequences.

**Karaṇīyamettā Sutta** or *Metta Sutta*. One of the central *paritta* texts excerpted from the *Samyutta Nikāya* (Collected Discourses).

**Karuṇā** The moral perfection of compassion.

**Kaṭhina** The robes presented to Buddhist monks at the end of the three-month rains retreat period when they are confined to the monastery. *Kaṭhina* celebrations usually take place during the month of November.

**Khwan** A Thai term meaning “spirit.” In Thai Buddhism every individual possesses thirty-two *khwan* or bodily spirits.

**Kyanzittha** The grandson of the founder of the Pagan dynasty in Burma, and one of its most powerful rulers. He ascended to the throne in 1084 C.E.

## L

**Lalitavistara** A proto-Mahayana biography of the Buddha associated with the Sarvastivada tradition.

**Liṅga** A phallic symbol of the Hindu god Siva. Understood by some scholars to be a symbol of the god-king (*devaraja*).

**Loi Krathong** The festival of the floating (*loi*) boats (*krathong*) celebrated in Thailand during the month of November. Considered to be Brahmanical in origin.

**Lokeśvara / Avalokiteśvara** A *bodhisattva* in divine form whose face dominates the Bayon, the central temple of the ancient Khmer capital of Angkor Thom; thought to be identified with King Jayavarman VII.

**Lokiya** Literally, “mundane” or “of the world.”

**Lokuttara** Literally, “transmundane.”

## M

**Mahākassapa** One of the principal disciples of the Buddha.

**Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** The “Discourse of the Great Decease,” which recounts the last days of the Buddha.

**Mahāsammata** The great elect; a just ruler. A term applied to the first monarch chosen to establish order in a chaotic world (see *Aggañña Sutta*).

**Mahāvamsa** “The Great Chronicle,” the most celebrated chronicle of Sinhalese Buddhism, produced by the Mahavihara monastic lineage.

**Mahāvihāra** A great monastery of the Sinhalese Buddhist capital, Anuradhapura. Became the center of Theravada Buddhism and repository of the Sinhalese commentaries. Buddhaghosa compiled his Pali commentaries there. Restored by Parakkama Bahu I (twelfth century). From this monastery, Theravada spread to mainland Southeast Asia.

**Māghā Pūjā** The celebration that marks the miraculous gathering of 1,250 disciples of the Buddha at Veluvanna Mahavihara in Rajagaha, north India.

**Maṇḍala** A diagram usually in the form of a squared circle, which variously symbolizes the unity of the individual, society, and the cosmos. In Southeast Asia’s ancient capitals, royal and religious buildings were constructed in the form of a *maṇḍala*.

**Mantra** A word or chant with special power or potency.

**Māra** In the Theravada tradition, Mara is the equivalent of Satan. Mara tested the Buddha at his departure from Kapilavatthu, and again when the Buddha was seated under the Bodhi tree at his enlightenment.

**Mettā** Loving-kindness. First of the Divine Abodes (*brahmavihara*); unlimited states of consciousness (*appamañña*).

**Moggallāna** One of the Buddha’s chief disciples. In Buddhist iconography he is often depicted paying respects to the Buddha.

**Mudra** A hand position of a Buddha image or a practitioner. Buddha images are often identified by their *mudras*.

## N

**Nat** A Burmese term for a powerful guardian spirit.

**Nibbāna** (Sanskrit, *nirvana*) The soteriological goal in Theravada Buddhism, meaning to have the passions extinguished, to have gained knowledge of the true nature of things.

## P

**Pabbajjā** Leaving the world, adopting an ascetic life, or ordination as a novice.

**Pacceka Buddha** One who becomes a Buddha by his or her own efforts, but who does not share the fruits of enlightenment with others.

**Pāpa** Evil, wicked, demeritorious action (*papakamma*).

**Pārami[ta]** Literally, “perfection.” In Theravada Buddhism the term often refers to the ten moral perfections personified in the last ten *jataka* stories in the Pali canon.

**Paritta** Literally, “protection, safeguard.” Commonly applied to a group of Pali texts first collated in Sri Lanka that are chanted at auspicious occasions throughout Theravada Southeast Asia.

**Paṭhamasambodhi** A text thought to have been written in northern Thailand in the sixteenth century that recounts the life of the Buddha.

**Paṭicca-samuppāda** A theory of causality or conditionality. Literally, “dependent co-arising.” The term refers to the basic teaching of canonical Theravada Buddhism that appears in a classical twelve-fold formula.

**Pātimokkha** The 227 rules to which fully ordained monks subscribe in a confessional ceremony held fortnightly.

**Petaloka** Refers to one of the hells or places of punishment in the Theravada cosmology. The *petas* (Sanskrit, *preta*) are likened to “hungry ghosts.”

**Petavatthu** (Stories of the Departed Ghosts) The seventh book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (Collection of Gradual Sayings) featuring stories of those reborn in the realm of the hungry ghosts because of their misdeeds.

**Phi** A Thai term for spirits believed to have malicious or mischievous powers.

- Pbra Malai*** A Thai Buddhist text about a saintly monk who visits those punished in hell for breaking the Buddhist precepts and those rewarded in heaven for keeping them. He then teaches humankind the consequences of good and bad actions.
- Pūjā** To make an offering, to worship, or to honor a god.
- Puñña** Meritorious acts that cause or influence good consequences.

## S

- Sāma** One of the final ten *jataka* stories in the Theravada canon. Sama personifies the virtue of loving-kindness.
- Samādhi** Concentration, intent state of mind; one of the constituents of the Noble Eightfold Path.
- Samsāra** Literally, “to come again and again,” “revolve,” hence, rebirth or transmigration.
- Sangha** An assemblage. Usually refers to the assembly of monks (*bhikkhu*) and/or nuns (*bhikkhuni*).
- Sariputta** One of the principal disciples of the Buddha who is often depicted with Moggalana paying respects to the Buddha.
- Sigālaka Sutta*** One of the discourses in the *Digha Nikāya* (Long Discourses) that prescribes the “ethic of the householder.”
- Sīla** Moral virtue. Often identified with the basic Buddhist precepts not to kill, steal, lie, commit adultery, or ingest intoxicants.
- Simā** The boundary stones that demarcate an ordination hall.
- Sumeru**, Mount (var., Meru, Sineru) In Indian cosmology, the central axis or mountain of the universe.
- Suññatā** Literally, “emptiness.” The term generally connotes that all dhammas are empty of self, and also interdependent co-arising (*paticca-samuppada*).
- Sutta** Literally, “thread.” Represents the threads of discourse or dialogue texts in the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism. There are four sections or collections of *suttas*: long (*digha*); middle (*majjhima*); collected (*samyutta*); and gradual (*anguttara*).

## T

- Tathāgata** Literally, “thus gone.” A title for the Buddha, referring to his “crossing over” to nibbana, that is, his enlightenment.

**Tāvātimsa** The second of the six *deva* or divine/heavenly realms in Theravada cosmology. The Buddha is reputed to have preached the *Abbidhamma* to his mother in Tavatimsa Heaven.

**Thammayut Nikai** (Pali, *Dhammayutika Nikāya*) A Buddhist sect founded by King Mongkut of Thailand in the nineteenth century.

**Theragātha / Therīgāthā** Eighth and ninth books of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (Collection of Gradual Sayings). Poems attributed to the male and female renunciant followers of the Buddha. Many are biographical in nature.

**Tilokarāja** (1442–1487 C.E.) Ruler of Chiang Mai, the dominant Tai state in northern Thailand.

**Tusita** The fourth of the six *deva* or heavenly realms in Theravada cosmology.

## U

**Upagutta** (Sanskrit, *Upagupta*) An enlightened Buddhist saint with protective powers ascribed to him because of his legendary victory over Mara. Prominent in legendary literature (*avadana*) associated with the Sarvastivada tradition.

**Upasampadā** Higher ordination; the rite of entrance into the Buddhist monkhood.

**Upekkhā** Equanimity; one of the sublime states of consciousness.

**Uposatha** The Buddhist sabbath day calculated according to the four phases of the moon.

## V

**Vassa** The period of the monsoon rains retreat observed by Buddhist monks; usually occurs between July and October.

**Vessantara** The last incarnation of the Buddha prior to his rebirth as Siddhattha Gotama. In the last of the 547 Pali canonical *jataka* stories, he personifies the virtue of generosity.

**Vihāra** Literally, “an abode or dwelling place.” Also refers to the building where monks gather for chanting services.

**Vimānavatthu** (Stories of the Heavenly Mansions) Sixth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (Collection of Gradual Sayings) that describes the splendors of the celestial abodes belonging to different deities obtained as a reward in previous lives.

**Vinaya** The monk’s discipline. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* refers to those texts that concern the monastic order and the rules of discipline.

**Viññāna** Consciousness; a mental quality constituent of individuality.

- Vipassanā** Insight meditation in contrast to trance (*samatha*) meditation.
- Visākhā** Daughter of a wealthy merchant. She is a supporter and patron of the Buddha and the sangha. Her male counterpart is Anathapindika.
- Visākhā Pūjā** An occasion celebrating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha. Usually occurs in May.

## Y

- Yasodhara** The wife of Prince Siddhattha. Also known as Bimba.



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